



JESSICA  
OF THE  
CAMERONS



SYLVIA  
STEWART



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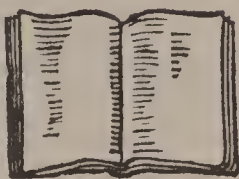
“LETTUCE ALL NICE, FRESH; HOW MUCH-A YOU LIKE?”  
HE SAID



# Jessica of the Camerons

By

SYLVIA STEWART



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TO THE YOUNG DAUGHTERS OF AMERICA,

"Standing, with reluctant feet,

Where the brook and river meet,"

## WHO WILL BE THE MOTHERS OF THE COMING GENERATION.





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## CHAPTER I

### THE EXPECTED VISITOR

"MARGIE! Margie! Wait for me!"

Jessica Cameron came dancing down the steps of one of the prettiest homes on a certain avenue in Cleveland, Ohio, her brown eyes shining, her every ruffle and ribbon fluttering with excitement. Promptly at her call her chosen schoolgirl affinity, Marjorie Sheldon, half a block ahead, changed the impetuous skippety-skip, with which she had been propelling herself schoolward, to a sedate backward movement, accomplished principally on her heels, until joined by her friend.

"I've got the most loveliest news to tell you," began Jessica, breathlessly. "Papa just got the letter—"

"Most loveliest!" mimicked Marjorie. "That will be a cracker-jack for my list of incorrect expressions this afternoon and will make ten for me. How many have you got?"

Marjorie was not indifferent to her friend's "most loveliest" news, but she was a decided tease,

and liked, moreover, to invite Jessica's protest against the consideration of lessons outside of school hours—a protest which came promptly.

“Oh, bother your old grammar! I hadn't but two. I've got another though, since your latest contribution, for 'have got' is as incorrect as 'most loveliest.'”

“Ha! Ha!” laughed Marjorie. “You just said 'have got' yourself.”

“Listen, Margie dear, and let me tell you,” giving her chum's arm a gentle shake. “My Kansas grandmother is coming next week to make us a long visit and maybe she will stay all winter.”

“*Your Kansas grandmother?* Say, kid, I never knew you *had* a grandmother, Kansas or any other kind. I'm sure I never heard you speak of her.”

Jessica flushed slightly. “Well, you don't usually talk about your own folks very much outside your own family, do you, especially if you don't know them very well? Mamma and papa talk about her a whole lot, and so does Don.”

“Did you ever see her?”

“Not since I was a weenty, teenty girl. Mamma took me out to Kansas with her when I was only two years old; but Don spent the summer with her three years ago, and he never gets tired telling what a good time he had.”

“Where did you say she lives? In Kansas?”



"Yes; but papa says that if he once gets her settled in Cleveland, he is never going to let her go back. She writes the loveliest letters to mamma, like the letters you read in the magazines sometimes, 'To My Daughter'; only they are funnier and more interesting. She always sends messages, too, to Don, and Harry, and me. What makes you look so solemn, Margie? You don't seem glad for me, a bit."

"Maybe you won't be glad for yourself before she goes home again," answered Marjorie, sagely. "Sadie Fowler's grandmother came here from Nebraska—that's close to Kansas, isn't it?—a year or so ago, to visit her folks, and she wasn't nice at all. Sadie said she was just awful glad when she got tired of Cleveland and went to live with an uncle of hers in New York."

"How wasn't she nice?" interrogated Jessica faintly.

"Oh, she was just so different," returned Marjorie, carelessly. "Sadie's folks are awfully rich, you know, and keep no end of servants; but her grandmother used to insist on making her own bed just as soon as she got out of it in the morning, which would be as early as five o'clock, sometimes, a good two hours before anybody except the servants was up; and she would go poking around the house like a spook, or a burglar, and fuss about having her

breakfast so late; and when Mrs. Fowler had the cook send an early breakfast to her room, she complained worse than ever; and said 'she just *couldn't* eat her meals alone, it was so *lonesome*.' Mrs. Fowler couldn't get her to wear a thing that was a bit stylish; she wore the queerest bonnets and old-fashioned dresses, and Augusta Fowler was so ashamed to have her friends see her that she told some of them, at first, that she was a distant relation of her father's who had been kind to him when he was a boy, and they felt they just had to treat her well. But she always called Mrs. Fowler 'darter' when she spoke to her before folks, and that gave Augusta away. She used to spank little Johnny Fowler whenever she caught him sliding down the banisters; she said 'it wore out his clothes too fast'; and she boxed Sadie's ears ever so often for nothing at all but talking back to her; 'being sassy,' she called it. I don't suppose *your* grandmother would do anything like that, though," she added, as she suddenly became aware of the cloud that was gathering on her friend's sunny face. "You can't tell a thing about these old people, though, especially if they have been brought up differently from folks nowadays, as most of 'em have."

"I don't believe my grandmother would be anything like that," protested Jessica, weakly. "She

has a fine home out in the oil belt somewhere—a big ranch, papa says—but she is going to let the man and his wife who live on it take care of it this winter. Mamma hasn't seen her for a good many years, so papa wrote to her without mamma's knowing anything about it, to come and spend the winter with us, and she is coming next week in time for mamma's birthday anniversary."

"There's always so many funny things in the papers about Kansas and Kansas people," Marjorie rambled on, reflectively. "There was that Mrs. Nation, you know, who went around knocking things to pieces in saloons. Claude read the funniest thing about her smashing her own knee with a hatchet one day because she found out there was a 'joint' in it. I laughed myself nearly sick over that. Then there was that Mary Ellen Lease, who went all over the country making queer political speeches, while her husband stayed at home and took care of the kids and did the housework. They lived in a sort of Indian wigwam, which they called Medicine Lodge. Claude read a funny thing about him, too—that he was such a good housekeeper that he never tucked the dishrag away in the corner of the sink any more, but washed it out and hung it up over the dishpan. There was a Jerry Simpson, too, a long time ago, who never wore any socks—'sockless Jerry' they called him in the papers—and he was a

congressman too. And I don't remember how many more, but Kansas is said to be the home of freaks. I wonder if your grandmother knows any of those funny people. How old is she?"

Jessica looked doubtful. "I don't know, exactly. We have her picture hanging in mamma's room, but it was taken a good while ago. She must be fifty or more; she must be over sixty; for she was a little baby at the time of the war."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Marjorie. "She must be awful old; wouldn't think your folks would dare to let her travel around alone! Wouldn't it be dreadful if she has rheumatism or asthma—all oldish people get something the matter with 'em—and you'd have to have the doctor coming to see her all the time? Mrs. Titus' father, who lives two blocks west of us, isn't sixty yet, and Mrs. Titus says he is more trouble than all the children put together; and they have six."

Jessica slipped her hand from her friend's arm, and her face assumed a very decided frown. "I think you are perfectly horrid, Margie Sheldon," she cried indignantly. "Grandma Keith is my mamma's very own mother; and I know she couldn't be a bit like any of those dreadful people you have been talking about. She has an auto and runs it herself; and papa says she manages her big ranch as well as a man could. She lives near a big uni-



versity town, and she goes in the best society; for she tells mamma in her letters about going to receptions and committee meetings. She couldn't be anything but nice—so there! If you make believe like that about her any more, I'll not even ask you to come to see her when she gets here, so I won't!"

The two girls had reached the great building where they attended school; and, more hurt than she would have cared to admit, by her friend's careless chatter, Jessica flounced into the cloakroom, unheeding Marjorie's half-laughing, half-serious protest that "she was only just talking, and did not intend to make fun of her grandmother."

"As if any of mamma's folks could be like that horrid, bent-up, old Mr. Titus!" she thought angrily to herself, as she passed to her seat at the summons of the bell. "I just hope Grandmother Keith will be lovely, when she comes, and I guess that will take some of the conceit out of Miss Margie Sheldon!"

She evaded her friend's questioning glances in her direction as much as possible throughout the afternoon session, and ignored altogether the pleading look that friend bestowed upon her as they stood together for a few minutes at the blackboard. The paper containing a half-dozen chocolate creams—her favorite confection—which the repentant Mar-

jorie left on her desk in passing she flirted promptly to the floor as soon as her teacher's back was turned; and it was as quickly appropriated by the grinning red-headed boy across the aisle, who was Jessica's pet abhorrence.

This incident did not tend to improve her injured feelings, and she purposely remained after school to ask Miss Dunn's assistance in solving a difficult problem. In answer to Marjorie's subdued inquiry as to whether she should wait for her Jessica replied, very pointedly for her, that she didn't know when she was going home, but *she knew the way*.

If kind Miss Dunn noticed "the rift within the lute" between the two usually warm friends, she wisely kept her own counsel and gave her pupil the help which she saw had not been needed; and Jessica walked slowly homeward alone, her mind dwelling more and more on her friend's thoughtless speech.

What if it should happen to be true, as Marjorie had inferred, that her grandmother should be—well, queer, like the people her chum had mentioned? Pride, pride in her own appearance, in her perfectly appointed home, her ideal father and mother, and her two fine brothers—this was one of Jessica Cameron's weaknesses, and it gave her many uneasy hours in the week that followed.

"Do you remember Grandmother Keith very

well, Don?" she asked her older brother, a lad of sixteen, as the two sat together over their lessons that evening in the cosy library at home.

"Well, I should snicker!" was the boyish reply. "And I can also remember what lickin' good cookies and doughnuts she used to make, too; and what a lot of fun I had out there on that old ranch!"

As Jessica had told Marjorie, her brother had spent the summer with his grandmother, some three years before, on the Kansas farm, having been sent out to take "rugged treatment," as he called it, after a winter's round with scarlet fever.

"Tell me something about her," invited his sister, pushing her history aside, and laying her head on her folded arms. "How did you have fun?"

"Oh, there were some old coal mines—surface mines, they called them—in the timber on grandmother's farm, and the boys from town—it was only a mile away—used to come out there and play 'robber.' We would make believe to rob banks, and hold up stagecoaches, and everything like that, using the coalholes to hide in. On the next farm there was the biggest mulberry grove I ever saw; it was just alive with crows, a regular crow colony, and the man who owned the farm used to let us boys go over there any time, and shoot crows. They were so troublesome that he gave us a nickel apiece for every crow we killed; and some days we would get

as many as a dozen. Then I went to the river sometimes, too. It was five miles away, but grandmother would always let me go when there were big boys or men going over on a fishing excursion. There was a cave over there so large you could almost get lost in it, and there were hundreds of names carved on a big rock that hung over the front of it. I nearly wore out my best knife one day—”

“But I want you to tell me something about grandmother,” interrupted Jessica. “You’ve told me about that cave dozens of times! Was she always nice to you?”

Donald looked up queerly. “Nice to me? What do you mean, sis? Isn’t a fellow’s grandmother always nice to him, that is, when he does the square thing?” the latter clause hastily added as a sudden recollection came to him of a certain night when he had remained away far past bedtime, and had found only bread and milk awaiting him for supper, though the cooky jar had been replenished only that morning and there were two fresh blackberry pies on the pantry shelf.

Then Jessica unburdened her soul. The matter was something she could not discuss with her mother—“grandma’s very own little girl,” as she thought to herself—but her chum’s insinuations had robbed her grandmother’s coming of all its pleasur-



able anticipations, and she longed to confide her doubts and fears to someone.

"Margie says that most old people are cranky and fussy, and sometimes sickly and awfully cross," she ventured, doubtfully. "I wondered if perhaps Grandmother Keith might be that way. I looked at her picture up in mamma's room; but it was taken nearly ten years ago, and you couldn't have much of an idea from it how she looks now. She isn't so pretty in the picture, but she is awfully young-looking, and kind-looking too."

"That picture doesn't look anything like her. It isn't half as good-looking as she is, and I wouldn't give a minute's thought to anything that Margie says about her," declared her brother warmly, noting, for the first time, the cloud on his sister's brow and the gloom apparent in her tone. "That girl knows less every day. Grandmother's a *peach*, and she isn't old and infirm, either; and if we can persuade her to stay all winter, I'm going to coax dad mighty hard to let us both go home with her next summer. If we could both get a mild case of measles, or something or other, early next spring, and get sent out there to recruit up, wouldn't it be jolly?"

Jessica smiled, but her smile was somewhat forlorn. "I am afraid that wouldn't work," she answered. "There would be Harry to be thought

of, too, and if one of us was sick and not the other, it wouldn't be so 'jolly' for the one that had to be shut away from mother for three weeks, like I was when you had scarlet fever."

Donald grinned. "It did take you a long time to get used to saying good-night through two doors and across a hall, didn't it? You should have comforted yourself with the thought that there was nobody around to keep you poked up all the time, to do your work. By the way, sis, Grandmother Keith is the worst person to keep busy I ever saw in all my life."

"Is she worse than mamma?" inquired Jessica, her spirits sinking once more; for Jessica Cameron was undeniably indolent.

"Mamma isn't a circumstance," declared Donald, decidedly. "Grandmother can do more things, and do them easier, than anyone else I know. But speaking of work, we must cut out this gabble, or I will get zero on this geometry lesson tomorrow morning."

Jessica was very fond of her big brother Donald, who seldom teased her as Marjorie's older brother sometimes did her chum; and now she felt somewhat comforted by Don's assurance that grandmother was "a peach," even if the information seemed a trifle vague. She put away her history—she could not study with anything else on her mind—

promising herself that she would rise early and complete the scarcely-looked-over lesson, a promise that Don would have laughed at if she had voiced it openly, and, going up to the nursery, she indulged in her usual romp with her small brother, Harry, before Nora, the maid, should tuck him away for the night. This put her in better spirits, and she practiced her music lesson with extra care, then said good-night to her brother, who was still absorbed in his studies, and went quietly away to bed.

Alone, however, in her dear, white bedroom, all the doubts and forebodings which had been conjured up by Marjorie's careless comments revived, and would not be banished. Shadowy visions of all the ugly, homely people she had ever known or read of came trooping before her eyes: Mary McTaggart's grandmother who, it was reported, was nearly one hundred years old, and was toothless and nearly blind; old Mrs. Manley, who lived over on Prospect Avenue, and who, though worth many thousands of dollars, was so niggardly that she persisted in piecing quilts for a living, and carrying home her own marketing; Hazel Lee's grandfather, who because of exceeding deafness always shouted "Hey" at her when she addressed him, which always made her jump—these real beings, as well as all the dwarfed, misshapen goblin men and women of her fairy stories (and she had read many), in-

vaded her quiet room like so many veritable human beings. The result was that when her mother, who had been out with her father to hear a noted lecturer, slipped into the room for a parting look at this "apple of her eye," Jessica lay with wide, staring eyes, and cheeks upon which there was an excess of color.

"I supposed you would be asleep, little daughter," said the gentle voice. "You are not sick?" laying a soft hand against the flushed cheek.

Jessica shook her head. It was in her mind to confide in this unfailing comforter—there had never been any secrets between them—but through the tender concern for herself in her mother's tones the girl suddenly became aware of a deeper note of joy; the dear mother-eyes were alight with it.

"You are glad because grandmamma is coming, aren't you, mamma?" she queried, half doubtfully.

An emphatic hug and a royal smile were her answer, before her mother added, "Suppose you had not seen your mother, Jessica, for ten years, and all at once you found you were to have her in your own home for a whole winter! This is, indeed, a lovely surprise papa has given us for mamma's birthday gift, big enough to reach around the whole family. We will all enjoy grandma."

"Does she look like the picture of her in your room?" questioned Jessica.



"Yes and no. That is not a very good picture of grandmother," answered Mrs. Cameron. "But it was the best one we could get at the time, and I was so hungry for the sight of her when your little sister Grace left us, that I was quite foolish about it; so papa had that picture enlarged from the best photograph we had at the time, so that I could have it hung on the wall to look at."

"That was eight years ago," said Jessica, softly. "Why didn't she come to you then?"

"She was out in Oregon with my only brother, Horace, who needed her then even worse than I," was the quiet response. "He had just lost his wife and his only child—your Aunt Kate and little cousin Lucy—in a frightful railroad accident in which both were burned to death; and mother was with him for several years. He married again five years ago, and he did not need her so much, so she came back to Kansas. She takes an active part in the affairs of her home community, has a good many acres of land leased out in the oil and gas region which is being developed in her part of the state, and, in looking after these and managing the large ranch where she lives, she has been such a busy woman that it has not seemed convenient for her to make us a visit. But we will make her so much at home this winter, will we not, little daughter, that she will not wish to leave us for Kansas again?"



She is to have the big room next to yours. We will begin fitting it up for her tomorrow, and I shall depend on my little Jessica to look after all her small needs and wishes, and help to make her winter with us a happy one."

"I'll try, mamma," and, returning sleepily her mother's warm kiss, the young girl went comfortably away at last on her deferred journey to "Slumberland," and dreamed that a lovely old lady, with snow-white hair, and a dress of shimmering silk, was carrying her off to Kansas in a beautiful motor car!

## CHAPTER II

### THE ARRIVAL

FOR Jessica, the next few days went by on wings. If she had any further misgivings regarding the personality of the expected guest, she kept them to herself and, outside of school hours and duties, threw every waking minute into the plans for her grandmother's reception and entertainment.

After Marjorie's frank, offhand apology, which came as promptly next morning as Marjorie herself, the subject of the expected guest was scarcely mentioned between the two girls; but, though Jessica had graciously extended the desired forgiveness, a shadow of reserve remained between them for the remainder of the week, and prevented Jessica from admitting her chum to her confidence during the time of the home preparations.

"I'll forgive her, of course," she had thought to herself, "for if I didn't, however could I say 'forgive us our debts *as*,' when I say my prayers; but I just hope, I do, that I will have such a lovely grandmother to surprise her with that she'll be ashamed she talked that way."

Though the time passed quickly, bringing at last her mother's birthday anniversary and the day of grandmother's coming, the anxiety of the waiting was almost too much for the sensitive little girl, and even her father noticed her attitude of strained expectancy.

"Jessica seems to be all worked up over mother's coming," he remarked to his wife. "I do not remember ever to have seen her so excited."

"I am afraid I have allowed her to over-interest herself in arranging mother's room, without intending to do so," rejoined Mrs. Cameron. "She is not given to overwork, as you know; but she has seemed so enthusiastic over the furnishing and arrangement that it was hard to refuse her help. I do not know what she anticipates, Dick," with a gay little laugh, "but, from some of her remarks and suggestions, I fancy she expects to find mother a decrepit, half-invalid octogenarian. She kept at Donald until he gave up his favorite hassock to put under mother's writing desk, which, by the way, is a great puzzle to her because of its size and businesslike appearance. And today I discovered her examining the hot-water bottle, in the medicine chest, to make sure it was ready for service."

Mr. Cameron laughed heartily. "Well, her suspense is about over; but, from the little I saw of mother when I made that flying trip to Kansas

with Don three years ago, I imagine Jessica will have the surprise of her life when she comes."

"I am hoping much from mother's influence on the child this winter," continued Mrs. Cameron. "I have tried in every possible way to encourage in Jessica a spirit of industry—I am afraid I have almost nagged her at times—but my efforts seem to be of little avail. Miss Dunn tells me she is doing very indifferent work at school this fall, and she certainly does not exert herself at home. If she were anyone else's daughter than yours and mine, Dick, I fear I would look on her as downright lazy."

"She'll come out all right," declared her husband, indulgently. "She has a tender conscience and mother will reach her somehow, through that. She was always working the 'duty racket,' as Don would say, to keep me in the path of rectitude," with a laugh. "Jessica is growing; and a girl of fourteen is a sort of Chinese puzzle, anyway."

Late that afternoon Jessica was in the library, her mind and body in a turmoil of feverish expectation, when she heard the humming of the motor which was bringing the guest from the station. She slipped quietly into the hall in time to see her father whirl a lady in a plain traveling dress from the car to her mother's waiting arms, and she dashed a sudden tear from her eye as she heard the glad

exclamations of mother and daughter in this long-deferred meeting.

"I'll just have to like her, for mamma's sake," she instantly confided to herself, "even if she is as homely as Hans Andersen's ugly duckling."

She was scarcely conscious what happened in the next few minutes. She saw Donald go forward and bestow an awkward kiss and a bearlike hug on the newcomer; saw her mother lift her little brother Harry up to be most warmly greeted; and then, in response to her father's surprised inquiry, "Where is Jessica?" she caught her breath in one swift spasm of fear and hope, and went forward to look into the sweetest face, it seemed to her just then, that, next to her mother's, she had ever seen, the face of her Kansas grandmother.

"Why, she looks just like you, mamma!" was the girl's first surprised exclamation, as she felt herself folded in a pair of warm arms; and, looking beneath the odd remark, Mrs. Cameron thought she detected something of the cause of her daughter's uneasiness the past week.

"Not so young by twenty years, nor yet so good-looking!" was the gay rejoinder from the new arrival. "But if I 'look like mamma,' I hope that is an indication that I shall find an unoccupied corner for myself somewhere in her Jessica's heart. How very like you, when you were her age, she is,



Margaret," holding her at arm's length for a tender look, then gently encircling her again.

"Three of a kind!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, gayly, attempting to take them all in his arms at once; but his efforts failed, for grandma was a well-rounded matron, mamma was no featherweight, and Jessica promptly wriggled out of the group. So papa whirled grandma off to the living-room, divested her of her wraps, and installed her in a great, easy chair, amid her laughing protests.

"I am not in the least tired," she insisted. "I slept like a baby both nights I was on the road, and have eaten every meal as though I never expected to see another!"

From her favorite perch in the deep bay-window, where Don was wont to say his sister did most of her daydreaming, Jessica shyly inspected this addition to the Cameron family. Her heart swelled with pride and triumph as she sent timid glances grandmother-ward. The new arrival might be sixty years of age, or she might be fifty; she certainly did not look much older than Jessica's own mother, for her eye was not dim to the point of wearing glasses, and her natural force did not appear to be in the least abated, as she sat in the big chair and conversed easily and interestingly concerning her journey. The removal of her traveling hat, a turban of soft, gray silk, showed but few gray hairs

among the brown and still abundant tresses that were parted in light waves, coiled in a dainty coiffure, and confined by an amber comb and a few handsome gold pins. Her costume was quite such a one as Jessica saw frequently on the ladies of her mother's acquaintance, and she noticed that the silk shirt waist, with its plain but elegant gold buttons, was immaculate and matched the perfectly tailored skirt.

Jessica's spirits rose as she looked and listened. She breathed a long sigh of relief as she took in the ladylike figure, and heard the refined speech of the new arrival, who seemed scarcely past the prime of beautiful womanhood.

"I'm going to tease Margie a whole lot before I give her a chance to inspect my Kansas grandmother," she thought, secretly. "As Don says, I'll just 'put one over on her' for thinking she is so smart!" These thoughts, alas, showed that in Jessica's girlish heart her chum had not yet been quite forgiven.

"You may show grandmother to her room, Jessica, if she wishes to freshen up before dinner"—her mother's voice recalled Jessica from her own reflections—"while I help Nora out a little." Jessica proudly led the way to the well-appointed room, and shyly called her guest's attention to the fact that it was adjoining her own, but that there was

a lock on the door connecting the two rooms, to make use of whenever she wished.

"We will make arrangements to hide the key, or lose it altogether, before we go to bed," declared the newcomer; "and the good times we shall have in these two rooms this winter will go down in history—the history of your life and mine, eh, Jessica?"

Jessica smiled a shy assent. "I'll show you about the bathroom and the hot- and cold-water faucets, if you would like me to," she said. "They are a kind of puzzle if you are not used to them."

"But I am, though," responded Mrs. Keith. "We have hot and cold water over the whole house at the ranch, and gaslights even in the cellar."

"But I thought you lived in the country!"

"So we do. But plumbers and gas-fitters and gas wells are not far away, so we manage to have most of the modern conveniences. Kansas is not the wilderness eastern people are sometimes led to believe; as you will find out, when I carry you off out there some of these days."

With her grandmother's appearance at the dinner-table half an hour later Jessica's last misgiving vanished, to return no more. Nothing could be more becoming than the gown of soft, gray silk, with its dainty frills of soft lace at neck and wrist, and nothing more charming than the newcomer's graceful ease of manner and ready flow of small talk.

"She's what you might call almost handsome, for one of her age," decided Jessica, "but more than that, she's got a face you just love to look at," watching the play of expression on the refined features, "just as though she's had a lot of experiences, and every one has made her just a little nicer."

Donald was early drawn into the conversation. Jessica, listening from her place at her father's side, and answering only in shy monosyllables when addressed, wondered at this, as her brother was somewhat awkward and ill at ease with visitors. The family circle became almost hilarious, as he and Mrs. Keith exchanged reminiscences of his visit to the ranch three years previous. Their lively banter so pleased and astonished the youngest scion of the family, that he forgot to eat his dinner, but sat with spoon upraised, and mouth and eyes wide open in fixed attention. Jessica, noticing his absorption, exclaimed so loudly in her enjoyment of his attitude, that he promptly slipped under the table—his usual way of avoiding undue attention—and was with much difficulty persuaded to appear again above the board!

In the flow of merry recollections the family learned, for the first time, of the posse of bold cowboy bandits which Donald had organized in the staid little village near his grandmother's home, and of how he had trained them in the ways of the plains



after the pattern set forth in Buffalo Bill's Wild-West show. It also developed that his temporary guardian had smiled encouragingly on this imitation of "the wild and woolly West" until the unfortunate day when the band was caught in the act of lassoing a prize calf belonging to a neighbor, and several of its members, including the leader, were treated to a ducking in a pond of very dirty water, by the said neighbor's indignant hired man! The band, by Mrs. Keith's orders, was immediately disbanded, and Donald narrowly escaped being banished forthwith to the effete East.

It also transpired that the would-be plainsmen, finding their cowboy tendencies frowned upon, had descended to honorable labor; and, as captains of industry, had hired out in a body to a neighboring farmer, to pick blackberries through the stress of the season. With the funds thus acquired they had purchased the village grocer's entire left-over stock of Fourth-of-July fireworks, including firecrackers, torpedoes, pinwheels, and one immense Roman candle. In the celebration which followed such an acquisition of material they had succeeded in setting fire to a small barn belonging to the father of one of the boys. The structure had been saved from destruction only by the most strenuous efforts of the young patriots, who formed themselves into an efficient bucket brigade which did valiant service.



Donald himself was the narrator of this bit of history of that strenuous summer, and his grandmother hastened to soften the horrified looks of the family circle by adding that he had purchased for all the boys immunity from the wrath of the barn's owner by offering his entire allowance of pocket money—which was generous—for two months, to make good the loss, a concession which the owner generously declined.

Donald was somewhat embarrassed by this information, as he was later when grandmother informed him that the debating society, which he had organized soon after the fire, had not been discontinued, but was still flourishing, and had been named, in honor of its founder, The Cameron Debating Club.

It was still midweek, but all thought of lessons was abandoned, and the Cameron family circle gave itself up to the pleasure of entertaining the new arrival. It was a cool evening in September, and a light wood fire was laid in the library, in the only wood grate which the gas-warmed house afforded; and in its genial glow they all gathered, as soon as dinner was concluded.

"You don't look a day older than you did ten years ago, mother," declared Mr. Cameron, as he leaned on the mantel and approvingly surveyed the newcomer. "How have you succeeded, all these

years, in staying the relentless hand of Father Time?"

"I am afraid you have just come from a fresh smack at the blarney stone, son," replied his foster-mother. "I have had no time, however, to attend to such an unimportant matter as growing old. I was with Horace, you know, for nearly five years after Kate's death, and while there I took up painting in oil and water color, which I had a long-standing desire to learn. There is so much inspiration in the scenery out there, and so many good teachers, that my opportunity was only bounded by my ability. Then, as Horace had a fine housekeeper and I seemed to have few duties save to keep him from absolute melancholy, I obtained the position of assistant at one of the public libraries, and reveled in a course of literature during the remainder of my stay. When he remarried, I decided that he and his wife would be best left to themselves, and I returned to my Kansas dug-out again. It seemed necessary, too, as the oil and gas leases which had just been made needed looking after."

"Horace wrote me that he was indebted to you for his second wife. I had never regarded you before in the light of a matchmaker."

"'It is not good for man to be alone' was never truer than in his case. The lady he married was an assistant in the city library, where I was employed.

She was one of the sweetest women I have ever met. I took her up with me to dinner one night, and I saw at once that they were, or could be, affinities. I spent a month with them last summer, you remember. They have a lovely little daughter, and she is the living image of the little Lucy that was lost. I think I never knew a happier home. Come here, Harry," added Mrs. Keith, coaxingly, to the bashful three-year-old, who was shyly regarding her from the vantage ground of his father's legs. "Pretty soon the big express wagon will come rumbling up here, and what do you suppose it will bring you from Kansas?"

"Anuvver dranma?" queried Harry, doubtfully.

"Heaven forbid!" laughed grandmother. "Papa and mamma would certainly consider that an embarrassment of riches. Guess again."

"Is it somefing good to eat?"

"It is, but it is also safe to say that you will never eat it," returned grandma, and Jessica and Donald looked mystified.

"It has very long ears (papa suddenly looked wise), four feet, no tail to speak of,—"

"Oh, a donkey! a mountain burro, perhaps!" cried Jessica.

Papa shook his head, laughingly. "The only tailless donkey I ever saw was one made of cotton cloth, which you children worked all one evening to

affix a paper tail to," he commented. "This seems to be a guessing game for the whole family. Mamma, it is your turn."

"I think I could guess, but I am not going to venture yet," she said. "Harry, if I were to tell you that the something is a furry ball, probably either gray or white, that is not so large as your kitty, and hops about in the grass at night to find something to eat, could you guess what it is?"

"Oh, a wabbit! a wabbit!" cried the little boy, his shyness of the stranger suddenly forgotten. "Dranma, show me to it, twick!"

"Mamma is 'away off,' as the boys say," declared grandma. "When it is grown this something will be twice as large as your kitty, unless you have a whale of a cat. There are two of them, and they are quite small yet, or I could scarcely have brought them."

The rattle of wheels on the driveway sounded at that very moment, and papa and Don went out, to return in a few minutes with a box the size of a cracker box, which had numerous holes bored in its sides, and was fitted with a sliding glass cover.

There was scarcely room for the group of heads which bent eagerly over the box, but the same exclamation came in unison from all but Harry, who could only gaze in wonder—"Jack rabbits!"

Looking up at the faces above them, half in fear,



half in curiosity, were a pair of half-grown jack rabbits, their silky ears laid along their backs, their soft eyes blinking in the glare of the gas jet overhead.

"Where did you get them, mother?" exclaimed Mr. Cameron. "Or, rather, how did you get them? I had not supposed a jack rabbit could be captured alive by any means."

"One of the men was doing some late plowing this summer," answered Mrs. Keith, "and he ran over the mother with the plow, injuring her so badly that it was necessary to put her out of her misery. As he was sure she had young ones near, he hunted till he found her nest in a shallow hole in the ground, and, sure enough, there were two baby jacks in it. He brought them to me in his coat pocket, saying he would rather see the cat eat them than think they were starving to death. But puss adopted them at once, in place of four little ones of her own which she had recently lost. She proved an excellent mother, and cared for them until they were old enough to forage for themselves. It was a crazy experiment, perhaps, to bring them so far from their native heath, but they seem to be all right."

"Are they tame?" asked Donald, bending over the box again, his eyes and voice shining with all the enthusiasm of a boy with a live pet.

Grandmother Keith slipped to the floor by the



side of the box, and slid the glass cover ajar. "Do you want some cabbage, Jack?" she asked, and one of the gray beauties thrust his nose into her hand, rooting it impatiently when he found it contained nothing.

"They are hungry. I fed them well before starting, and furnished the expressman an abundance of food for the trip; but a jack rabbit will scarcely touch wilted or stale food, and, too, they have missed their fresh milk, of which they are very fond."

"Let us take them down to the basement where there is lots of room for them to run, and give them something to eat," proposed Don, so the entire family followed him and the rabbit box to the roomy basement. Mamma went on a foraging expedition in behalf of the hungry strangers, and returned with some fresh bread, some cabbage leaves, and turnip tops, and a generous dish of milk.

Mrs. Keith opened the box wide and the rabbits hopped lightly out, stretching their long legs, much to Harry's delight. They eagerly appropriated the new milk, and, though they were somewhat shy of so many strangers, whom Mrs. Keith's presence, however, seemed to offset, they ate a hearty supper before a delighted audience.

"This one is Jack," explained Mrs. Keith, indicating the larger of the bunnies, "and that one is

Jill. We had a wire enclosure for them, but, as they could dig under it and soon grew large enough to jump over it, they were often out. A neighbor's greyhound has been chasing them lately. Jill seldom strays far enough from the house to give him a chance at her, but Jack has several times led him a merry chase around the house and barn. When he gets tired, Jack hops in at the storehouse window, which is always left open for them."

"Do they ever get sick?" inquired Jessica.

"They 'dump' occasionally, just as children are apt to do when they have had an overdose of dainties," laughed grandmother. "But they have been very healthy, except that Jack nearly died after eating too much green corn when the first roasting ears were harvested this summer."

Donald had disappeared while the others were admiring and discussing the young jacks, and he now returned, carrying an armful of half-dried grass. Turning the box on its side, he stowed the grass within it, and before the family returned to the upper room the travel-worn bunnies were cosily nestled upon it.

Harry was exceedingly reluctant to leave them. "I want to take the wabbits to bed wiv me," he insisted. "I dot lots of woom in my bed."

"We will make them a nice home out in the big yard in the morning, Harry," comforted the big

brother, tossing the little boy on his back for a ride to the upper regions; "and you may watch them eat grass all day. I believe he would sleep down here in the basement with them, if mamma would let him," he added aside to Jessica.

"Is 'em Harry's wabbits?" questioned the small boy, standing by his father's side after they had returned to the living-room. "Dranma said she bringed 'em to me."

That had, indeed, been grandma's intention, as she had fancied Don too old to care for a pet of that sort; but now she answered gently, "One is for you, Harry, and one shall be brother Don's for helping take care of both. They will have to be well cared for, if they live so far from their prairie home."

"I have often heard that jack rabbits will not live long in confinement," remarked Mrs. Cameron. "These two seem to be an exception."

"You could scarcely call it 'confinement,' if they had the run of a section of land, and were regularly exercised by a grey hound," laughed her husband.

"Then, too," added Mrs. Keith, "they were carefully cared for when they were little, and not handled at all. Old puss made them an excellent mother, and kept them properly licked and fed. When they were older I scattered green feed where they could get it at night, when rabbits do most of their eating, so they were soon self-supporting.

Their only difference with mamma puss seemed to be when she would bring them a tempting young mouse, and they would reject it, and insist on foraging for themselves in my lettuce bed."

"They will be a seven-days' wonder here," remarked Jessica. "I never saw one myself, before, outside of a picture, and I doubt if there are many children in Cleveland who have."

"They will certainly be a novelty," agreed mamma. "You will have to give a reception for them tomorrow after school, and invite your friends to come and inspect your Kansas acquisition."

"We must be sure, then, to have Margie come over," commented Jessica, in a mischievous aside to Don. "She has been very much interested in 'Kansas freaks' recently. I wonder if the jack rabbits would come in that class?"

"If they don't, I'm afraid she'll be disappointed in seeing any," returned her brother, with a swift, half-admiring glance at his grandmother, who had taken Harry on her lap and was charming him with her perfect rendition of an old nursery rhyme. That neither Don nor Jessica was disappointed in the arrivals from Kansas, was quite evident from their high spirits.

It was late that night before Jessica could compose herself to sleep. Her last conscious remembrance was of a white-robed figure that had slipped

to her bedside through the open door of the adjoining room, of a face, serene and sweet, bending over her—a face that was like her mother's, yet different—and of a tender good-night and a gentle kiss; and she had put her arms about the stranger's neck and drawn the already dear face closer to whisper sleepily, "I am so glad you have come, my dear Kansas grandmother!"



## CHAPTER III

### GETTING ACQUAINTED

IT was a happy Jessica that hopped blithely out of bed a good half hour earlier than usual next morning, to find the occupant of the adjoining room still sleeping. She roused at once, however, as her granddaughter's smiling face appeared at the half-open door, and, with a glance at the clock on the mantel, was out of bed with a bound.

"Good morning, Jessica. I must have been enchanted, like the sleeping princess," she exclaimed, gayly. "You will not be allowed to beat me up like this tomorrow morning, my girly."

"I don't always get up so early myself," confessed Jessica. "Don says my worst habit is dreaming after I am awake. I am going to dress Harry for mamma this morning, and, as I knew breakfast would soon be ready—we have it early on papa's account—I thought I would wake you first."

She ran down the hall to the room adjoining her mother's, where her small brother was jumping up and down in an ecstasy of impatience to "be dwdressed and go to feed the wabbits." She washed the rosy

face. brushed the mop of yellow curls, and buttoned the small shoes on the restless feet. At last he was ready to be turned over to Don for a pickaback ride down stairs, and Jessica peeped into grandmother's room to convoy her down to breakfast. She found her standing at the open window, in the daintiest of morning dresses, taking in long breaths of the invigorating air. Jessica joined her. The Cameron home overlooked beautiful Lake Erie, which, on this peaceful autumn morning, seemed to stretch away into infinite distances of rippling blue.

"This is my first sight of a large lake," said Mrs. Keith. "It reminds me of Puget Sound, though the surroundings are different. The shores of the sound are covered with evergreen trees, which grow to the water's edge in many places."

"The lake is very quiet this morning," replied Jessica. "I like it better when it has its pretty, white breakfast-caps on. Sometimes, though, when it rolls in big waves over the breakwater, it almost frightens me. Then, too, it does so much damage. To look at it this morning, you would not think it could be strong enough to batter large ships to pieces, but only last spring, in a terrible gale, there were several large freight steamers wrecked near here. They didn't make the harbor before the storm struck them, and next morning the shore was covered with wreckage of them, as well as of

small boats and fishing craft. Don and I walked down early, where the men of the life-saving station were taking some people from a foundered ship. We saw them bring in a little dead baby they had picked up on the beach" (here Jessica's voice faltered for a moment, and she shuddered faintly), "but it was smiling, as though it had not hurt it to die that way."

Grandmother Keith's hand closed softly over Jessica's, as it lay near hers on the window sill. Truth to tell, this newfound granddaughter had been something of a puzzle to her the previous evening, skilled reader of human nature though she was. But Jessica's shy confidence this morning seemed to indicate that she had, in some way, dispelled the hidden reserve, and she gladly met that confidence half-way.

"That was the Father's way, no doubt," she answered gently. "Perhaps it was mercifully saved from much sorrow in this life, and possibly from a more painful death.

'When the thunder and storm of the tempest are past,  
In the harbor of Peace all shall anchor at last,' "

she quoted softly, as they turned to go down at the sound of Nora's breakfast bell.

Jessica's feet seemed to have been changed to wings that morning as she tripped away to school.

She went early, though she would dearly have loved to help grandmother with her unpacking; but she did not want Marjorie to come for her, and perhaps get a sight of the precious grandmother, who, she had determined, should be kept from that critical young lady's sight as long as possible. Jessica was not usually given to taking note of slight grievances, but she felt that Marjorie's implied criticisms of a stranger so closely related to herself deserved a slight rebuke.

Marjorie was waiting impatiently for her on the first corner. "What made you in such a hurry?" was her greeting. "It isn't school time yet. I was coming up for you. Did she come?"

"She? Who? Oh, my grandmother? Yes, of course," answered Jessica, in most matter-of-fact tones.

"Is she nice? I mean, do you like her? Why don't you tell me about her?" she concluded, pettishly.

"I haven't had a chance yet," replied Jessica, demurely; "of course she is 'nice,' and of course I 'like her,' and what more do you want to know?" They walked a few steps in silence, and Jessica added pleasantly, "She brought Donald and Harry a pair of the sweetest jack rabbits! We are going to ask everybody down to see them after school."

"What did she bring to you?" asked Marjorie.



"Just herself," responded Jessica, promptly.

Marjorie made some murmured excuse of "another date at four," and there was a decided coolness between the chums for the remainder of the day; but released from school Marjorie, with a number of her mates, was duly on hand to inspect the boys' new pets. Donald had already arranged a large wire cage for them in a grassy corner of the yard adjoining the garage, and they showed off to such good advantage, eating impartially from the numerous friendly hands, and seeming not to fear the merry, noisy voices, that, as Don afterward told his mother, "he was so proud of them he could have eaten them both."

After the rabbits had been admired and discussed, the visitors departed, all but Marjorie, who, with the freedom of close acquaintance walked with Jessica into the house. "Aren't you going to make me acquainted with your grandmother?" she inquired, pointedly.

"I'm so sorry," returned Jessica, "but mamma and grandma have gone out for a ride; and, as Nora says they are going around for papa, they will not be back before six. Will you come into the library and wait?"

Marjorie refused, somewhat ungraciously, the polite invitation. "She just don't care to have me see her grandmother," she said to herself, as she



walked slowly homeward. "I'll bet it is as I predicted, and there's something odd or freakish about her. I don't mean to go near her again, though, till she asks me, if I *never* see her old grandmother!"

Before ten the next morning, however, which was Saturday, the telephone summoned Marjorie, and Jessica's voice came to her saying, "Say, Margie, can't you come over at half-past three and practice that duet for our next recital? Miss Kent says we must have it ready in two weeks, and that only gives one Saturday more."

"Aren't you going to the matinee?" interrogated Marjorie. It had become a custom with the girls of Marjorie's and Jessica's acquaintance to attend a picture show, matinee, or other form of entertainment, on Saturday afternoons. Mr. Cameron was much opposed to this, as was also his wife; but, as most of the other girls were allowed to attend regularly, it was difficult to say that Jessica could not go, at least occasionally, so, when the program was at all permissible, she was permitted to go with the others.

"Not today," came the prompt response. "The girls are going to the Novelty, aren't they?"

Marjorie assented. "The play is 'The Clansman,' and they say it is perfectly thrilling!"

"Well, grandma says that no young girl like me should read the book, let alone go to see it played,"

declared Jessica, with decision. "So I am not going."

"What did I tell you?" returned her chum, disgustedly. "What has your grandmother got to do with your going?"

"Not a thing in the world!" retorted Jessica. "But she and mamma surely know what is best for me, better than I do. Mamma says that if your mother knew what it was like, you would not get to go, either."

Marjorie was, by this time, very curious indeed concerning this newcomer at the Cameron's, to whose views Jessica seemed to yield such willing assent. "Well," she agreed, unwillingly, "mamma has already said that I cannot go unless you do, so I suppose I might as well come over and practice."

Jessica was alone when she arrived, and ushered her at once into the music room.

"Where is your grandmother?" asked Marjorie, glancing around expectantly. As Jessica was at that moment turning over some sheets of music in the cabinet, she did not answer at once, and Donald, coming in at that moment, replied for her that his mother had gone to a special meeting of the Ladies' Municipal League, and Mrs. Keith had accompanied her.

"Wasn't that the last feather of disappointment on the poor camel's back?" laughed Don, as the

visitor, after a very indifferent half hour at the piano with Jessica, made an excuse of finishing a book she was reading, and moodily departed for home. "She played that rondo as if it were the Dead March from Saul! I believe, Jessica, that if she doesn't make grandmother's acquaintance pretty soon, she will cut ours."

Jessica laughed mischievously. "Perhaps, as papa says to me sometimes, she will 'reserve her judgment' next time, until she knows some of the facts," she remarked.

On Sabbath morning, however, Marjorie was granted her heart's desire. The day was a perfect one, and the churchgoers were out in goodly numbers. The Sheldon pew was near that of the Camerons, and Marjorie had not been settled long at her mother's side when Mr. Cameron ushered into it a middle-aged lady in a plain silk gown, "with hat and gloves to match," as Marjorie inwardly commented, and she was aware at once that this was the Kansas grandmother. Jessica followed her mother and Donald, sending, as was her wont, a swift glance of greeting toward the Sheldon pew, with an added smile this morning, which Marjorie interpreted as one of distinct triumph.

She turned her attention, covertly, to the stranger. That she was a lady, even according to Miss Marjorie's somewhat exacting standard, was quite

apparent. That she was scarcely past the prime of life was also evident; there were few wrinkles on the pleasant, tranquil face, and this Kansas product apparently did not disdain to make use of such small aids to the modern woman's toilette as have their part in producing a desirable effect and a favorable impression.

"I don't wonder Jessica is disgusted with me," she confessed to herself, as she stole another look at the newcomer. "Her face reminds me of that expression Claude is always getting off at me when I fly into a tantrum, 'a lady is serene!' Just to look at her, I don't imagine that she was ever in a temper in her life."

She settled down in her corner of the pew, resolved to make amends to her friend, at the first opportunity, for her ungracious comments.

Marjorie's parents had been residents of Cleveland scarcely more than a year; but of all her acquaintances Jessica had seemed the most desirable, and she was, in the main, very loyal to the new friendship.

"Fine-looking woman, Mrs. Cameron's mother," remarked Marjorie's father at the dinner table that day. "Young-looking, too, to have a grandson of Don's age."

"She is quite stylish for a westerner, too," rejoined Mrs. Sheldon. "Her toilette seemed quite up to date, and very becoming."



"She probably bought her style from some eastern mail-order house," suggested Marjorie's brother Claude. "For that matter, you can get style anywhere in the United States now, where you can buy cloth and a paper pattern."

"It takes more than cloth and a paper pattern to enable a woman to present a stylish appearance," objected Mrs. Sheldon. "Good taste is the most necessary requirement, and Mrs. Keith seems, by her dress, to possess it."

"Mr. Cameron was telling me about her as we came home yesterday," pursued Mr. Sheldon. "He said he owes all his success in life to her. It seems his mother died while he was quite small; and his father died suddenly, leaving a will which appointed Mr. and Mrs. Keith his guardians. Mr. Keith died soon after, but Mrs. Keith assumed the responsibility of bringing him up and directing his education, even leaving her well-appointed home to be with him and her own daughter while they attended the State University."

"It was quite natural that he and Mrs. Keith's daughter should find themselves congenial," remarked Mrs. Sheldon. "Close acquaintance seemed to lead to high appreciation, in their case."

"How very romantic!" sighed Marjorie. "I suppose Mrs. Keith couldn't help but be mighty glad she had taken so much pains with his bring-

ing up, after he had fallen in love with her only daughter and married her."

"I read not long ago," said Claude, "of a lady who had five sons, and three of them were already married to girls she had taken into her own home and trained to be good housekeepers; and that she is now looking for suitable material from which to select wives for the other two."

"I doubt if anyone could work a scheme like that on Richard Cameron," laughed Mr. Sheldon. "He would be apt to have views of his own in the matter of choosing a wife. But Mrs. Cameron is a fine woman, and the entire family are the sort to be cultivated. I suppose you will call, Emily?" turning to his wife.

"Certainly," she answered. "Mrs. Cameron has already invited me to do so."

Marjorie lost no time in putting in force her good resolution to make amends to her chum for her thoughtless remarks of the previous week, and, as they walked to school together next morning through the bright autumn sunshine, she broke out, "Say, Jess, I want you to forgive me, right and all, for being so horrid mean to you about your grandmother. I didn't really say anything about her, you know, or at least I didn't intend to, but I just as good as, and I made you feel bad."

"That is no joke," replied Jessica, soberly.

"But, as long as your slam on Kansas people in general doesn't seem to me to hit her in particular very hard, I guess we'd better not think any more about it."

"She's a lovely looker," added Marjorie, impulsively, "and I'm sure she'd be awfully sweet to know. You are good to forget what I said to tease you, and I have made up my mind that I will never make remarks—unkind ones, I mean—about anyone again."

"We'll make a double bargain on that," declared Jessica; and the two girls stopped right there on the avenue, and gravely kissed each other. Marjorie seldom did anything by halves, and for that matter, neither did her chum.

"How long since you and your 'amigo' contracted the habit of osculating on the street?" gravely inquired Claude, as the Sheldons sat down to luncheon that day. "Did you forget, or neglect, your usual tender salutation in the first wild moment of meeting this morning?"

"Don't tease your sister, Claude," gently chided his mother. "Her friendship for Jessica Cameron is something I highly approve."

But Marjorie did not appear ruffled. "Jessica and I were only sealing a compact we had just made," she explained, lightly.

"From the public manner in which it was ratified

you should have no difficulty in obtaining witnesses, in case of a violation of the treaty by either party," pursued Claude. "If you were to see Donald and me stopping for such a performance as that on the public highway, what would you infer?"

"That you were both showing very poor taste, with so much more desirable kissing material all around you on the avenue. Helen King told Hazel Lee a day or two ago that you had a 'regular Cupid's bow' for a mouth," returned Marjorie, demurely. Thereupon her father laughed: "Score one for your sister, Claude."

The next day Jessica invited her chum to accompany her home after school, "specially to meet gramsie," and Marjorie did not refuse.

"She'll be sure to be at home this time," remarked Jessica, as they sought the living-room after a brief visit to the jack rabbits, "for I told her this morning that if she and mamma went gadding off down town this afternoon we would follow them up!"

Marjorie stared. "You didn't really? I shouldn't think you'd dare talk to your grandmother like that," she observed.

"Oh, we're pretty well acquainted by this time," answered Jessica, opening the sitting-room door as she spoke.

Mrs. Keith was evidently very much at home, for she was sitting on the floor engaged in the con-



struction of a miniature Tower of Babel, with Harry's almost too eager assistance. She scrambled to her feet as Jessica admitted her friend, and came forward at once.

"I am sure I do not need an introduction to this little lady," she said, as Jessica named her friend. "Marjorie is a household word here, I notice, so I am sure there can be but one."

She bent and kissed the soft cheek as she spoke. Marjorie was slightly embarrassed at first, but under the spell of Mrs. Keith's kindly tact she was soon at her ease.

"Let's go up to my room and see the writing-desk Don finished at Manual last week," Jessica proposed, after the three had "visited" a few minutes. "He has given it to me. May I show Margie the pictures in your room too, grandmother?" she asked.

"Certainly, if you wish," replied Mrs. Keith, and the two girls went up to Jessica's room, where they had had many pleasant hours together, and made a brief inspection of the new writing-desk.

"It doesn't look very large by the side of grandmother's," said Jessica, pushing open the door of the adjoining room as she spoke. "This is grandmother's room, and I am going to work and study here all winter." There was a little thrill of pride in her voice.

"Work at what?"

"Well, she is going to give me lessons in water color, for one thing. I know we have that at school, but I don't do it well. Grandmother has had lessons from a fine teacher out on the coast, and has offered to show me, so I can get better grades; and, if I do well, to give me lessons in oil too. That is one of her pictures," she added, pointing to a small canvas of Mount Rainier that occupied the wall above the large writing-desk, "and this is another," indicating a spirited copy of Rosa Bonheur's "Deer in the Snow."

"You don't mean to say she did them herself?" asked Marjorie, incredulously.

"Surest thing! That mountain one she just looked at from the top story of the Tacoma courthouse, and sketched it and the country around it, and then painted it. That's the way I want to learn to paint—right from nature."

"When are you going to begin?" asked Marjorie, a little feeling of jealousy creeping into her heart as she thought of this new element that had come into the life of her chum, she began to fear to her own partial exclusion. "Your lessons are so hard for you now that you can hardly get them, so I wouldn't think you'd have much time for anything else this winter."

"That's what mamma said," answered Jessica, frankly, though she flushed under her schoolmate's

implied criticism; "but I am to begin the first of October if I make good grades in my September work. I'll have to dig some, though, in the next two weeks, for I have two P's in history already, and it will take some scratching to cover them up!"

"You talk as though you were an old hen out in the dirt!" laughed Marjorie, her spirits unconsciously rising as she heard the terms of the contemplated art lessons. For Jessica did not love study, as her chum well knew; and the "put-off habit," as Donald called her neglect of her school work, had her in a strong grasp. But Marjorie had yet to learn the force of the new influence that was to come into her friend's life, and through that friend into her own.

Looking back, in the days that followed, to the coming of her "Kansas grandmother," as she loved to call her, it seemed to Jessica Cameron that it had been a turning-point in her whole existence. She was of a somewhat dreamy and retiring disposition, with quite serious views of life, which her parents scarcely credited her with possessing, but which her grandmother's shrewd vision had correctly interpreted early in her stay. On her part Jessica learned that her grandmother was a person of varied industries: that she was an excellent musician, often correcting Jessica's mistakes at the piano from the adjoining room; that she had been a

school-teacher, also a stenographer, and that she could handle the typewriter, which was part of the equipment of the big desk, with the speed and skill of an expert. Jessica also discovered that the knowledge her grandmother had been acquiring through life was not being laid aside in her mature years. Comparing her with the elderly ladies of her mother's acquaintance, Jessica soon realized the difference between them; for, while the latter seemed to be the subjects of a mere passive existence, as though life for them would soon be over, grandmother Keith gave every evidence of being very much alive in the present, and seemed to be looking forward to the accomplishment of much in the future. She had spoken shyly of this one night, as the two were curled up for a bedtime chat soon after her grandmother's arrival.

"You like to work, don't you, gramsie?" she had asked, as Mrs. Keith's fingers slipped in and out of the shining meshes of a little silk breakfast cap she was making for Jessica's mother.

"That is my one talent, Jessica dear," Mrs. Keith answered, gayly. "A noted writer once said 'genius is only another name for unlimited application.' If this is true, I narrowly escaped being one."

"I think you are one," replied Jessica. "Papa says you can do more things, and do them all well, than any other woman he knows. I wish I could



do all the things you know how to do," she concluded, wistfully.

"I am afraid papa is a sad flatterer!" laughed her listener. "You forget how many years I have lived, Jessica dear. By the time you are as old as I am now I hope you will have been able to have done much more than I for yourself and your fellows, and have done it much better. Opportunities are much greater now than when I learned 'to do all the things I can do,' " she finished, laughingly.

"How do you mean, gramsie?"

"Well, for instance, I was obliged to ride sixteen miles in a lumber-wagon, or on horseback, for my first music lessons, taking an entire day once a week; and then they were not from what you would consider a professional teacher today."

Jessica gave a little shiver of dismay. "I am afraid I would not have taken many. I pout sometimes, because I have four blocks to walk on a paved street; and can take a car if it is stormy."

"The difficulties in the way of getting them only made them more valuable to me," returned grandmother. "And so, today, when I see the wonderful advantages which are spread out for our young people, I could almost wish that I might begin all over again, at about your age, and see how much I could improve on my present capacity for accomplishment."

"But don't you ever feel like stopping work, grandmother, now that you don't need to work any more? Papa says that you are quite a rich woman."

Mrs. Keith's voice took on a more serious tone as she answered, "Tell me why I should store up my small abilities, now that I am in a position to make the most possible use of them, Jessica. Would that not be rather silly? I am as well and strong as I ever was. Why should I not keep busy? The more so, as there are pleasant opportunities on every hand to use my energies, and dispense, with my own hands, a part of my income, which I feel is only mine in trust."

"How do you mean, gramsie?" asked Jessica, again. "Didn't you and grandpa earn all the money you have now, and haven't you a right to spend it for anything you want?"

"Yes and no, dear. The rise in the price of land has increased the value of our ranch many times since we bought it, and of course we were all unaware of the value lying beneath the surface in coal and oil and gas. If I have been blest above others in these added riches, do you not think it is my duty, and should be my pleasure, to use a part of it for the good of others? That is one of the best of reasons why I love to keep busy. There are so many delightful ways popping up in which one can 'lend a hand.' "

"I do not need to ask you what you are planning to do this winter," the young girl ventured, after a thoughtful pause. "Papa says it is 'grandmother here and grandmother there,' in this household already, until he wonders mamma does not enter a protest. Mamma laughed and said that probably she made as many demands on your time as anybody else, and that you seemed to enjoy being used."

"She knows me of old. And now, little girlie, that we have talked about my work, suppose we finish the discussion of yours, which we began last night, and see if we cannot plan to use me, as mamma does, to add to your own opportunities."

Jessica winced. "Mamma almost thinks I am lazy, sometimes, I am sure," she responded. "But it seems so hard for me to get at the things I do not like to do. Did you ever *have* to do things you did not *like* to do, gramsie?"

"Such things as pull weeds all day in the corn-fields, or help pick up acres of potatoes, or milk five cows night and morning, or mend husking mittens until ten o'clock at night, or teach school all day and do the work for a family of three after I had walked a mile home?"

"Grandmother!" exclaimed Jessica. "You do not mean to say that you ever had to do any of those dread—things?"

"You were going to say 'dreadful,' " accused her companion, smiling. "Many and many a time, Jessica, and other things just as disagreeable; but I never remember viewing them in the light of a hardship, but only as 'the duty lying nearest.' Don't you know our work is a pleasure or a bugbear, precisely as we look at it?"

Jessica studied the tranquil face bent over the dainty work, glanced at the well-kept hands moving so gracefully in and out of the soft silks, and tried to imagine their owner engaged in some of the occupations she had just mentioned. Was it such experiences as these that had given the look of steadfast patience to grandmother's kind eyes, and that had left on her face the look of serene content which it always wore?

"In the early days of Kansas," continued Mrs. Keith, "a great many people burned cobs for fuel; and your grandfather used to run a corn-sheller in the winter time, moving it from farm to farm. This made it necessary for him to be away from home from very early in the morning till late at night, and sometimes he did not get home for several days. When he was away I attended to the stock at night, and in the summer I helped him stack hay, made the garden, and raised the chickens, and made myself generally useful."

Jessica did her best not to appear shocked at these



revelations. What would Marjorie think to hear grandmother thus frankly telling of doing the work of a common farmhand? "Did grandpa like to have you do those things?" she queried, at last, with some hesitation.

The first shadow Jessica had yet seen on the sweet face opposite clouded it for one moment, and was gone.

"We were always happiest when together, dear, no matter what our work happened to be. I helped him husk forty acres of corn one fall, as much for the pleasure it gave me to be out with him in the field, as from the desire to get the corn out early. If I could have but one wish gratified for you, Jessica, it would be that you would marry, as I did, and as your mother has done, a good man whose life would be bound up in yours. Labor for those we love is a pleasure, never a burden. And now, to come back to your plans for the next five months—for the first of March may see me in Kansas again—I have prevailed on mamma to let you commence your drawing and painting lessons at once, believing they will be an added inducement for you to excel in your other studies, which I am sure you feel at your age are very important."

Jessica rose from her low chair, and threw her arms around her grandmother's neck. "You dear gramsie!" she cried. "How did you know what

I wanted more than anything else in the world! Margie geyed me yesterday when I told her I had to get some good grades before I commenced, and she looked as if, as if—”

“As if she thought you would never get there!” concluded Mrs. Keith, laughingly. “Well, we will surprise Marjorie; and that the surprise may be easier of accomplishment, I am going to invite you to spend the hour from seven to eight with me at my desk, five nights in the week.”

Jessica made a slight grimace. “Don won’t like that,” she averred. “He used to go out to study with the other boys sometimes—with Claude Sheldon mostly—but since you came he hasn’t been away a single night; and he just loves to have you in the library where he works.”

“I have made provision for Don,” was the smiling reply. “He is not to be deprived of my charming society, but may come, too, whenever he wishes. Also, he and I are to have a half-hour all by ourselves in the morning, while Miss Jessica is weaving her morning fancies.”

“I have ‘cut that out,’ ” replied Jessica, laughing. “But I do not believe papa will consent to our putting any more strings on you.”

“This is a string I have affixed to myself,” retorted grandmother, “and I expect to be the chief puller thereof. Don is so like his father, Jessica,

that it is like living the old days over again to be with him and his lessons. Does my program suit you?"

A soft hug was sufficient reply. "I will do my best, gramsie, my very best," she promised.

"Thank you, dear. I knew you would make that promise, and I am sure you will keep it. And now I want to give you two mottoes for your daily guides, both of which will help you in your winter's work: '*Learn all you can, whenever you can, wherever you can, of whatever you can,*' and the other, '*Do the duty lying nearest.*' "

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "NANNY-MAN"

IT was the following Saturday afternoon, and Jessica had just returned to the library from the nursery, where she had been putting Harry away for the daytime nap which he still indulged in.

"What is that queer noise?" inquired Mrs. Keith, after a few moments. "It sounds like an auctioneer trying to draw a crowd together."

"It is only Harry, upstairs, imitating the street venders," explained Jessica. "The men who sell fruits and vegetables from house to house are not allowed on the residence streets before noon, on account of disturbing the large number of workmen who work all night in the furnaces and smelters, and sleep in the forenoon. Listen!"

She set the hall door ajar, and the child's voice drifted down from the upper room, repeating sleepily, "Appuls, nunnions, tatoes, fwesh fish, nannies, nan-nies—" until at last it trailed off into silence.

"Their coming on the street just at the time of his regular nap was what got him into the habit,"



she continued, "and now he always puts himself to sleep that way, when he takes a daytime nap. I want you to be sure to hear him when he wakes up. It is too funny for anything. Don calls it 'before and after taking.' "

An hour later, Mrs. Keith was absorbed in writing a letter to her brother, and Jessica was putting the finishing touches to a very satisfactory sketch of the big chestnut tree in the yard, which she had been doing under grandmother's supervision, when there was a sudden clamor above stairs which sounded as though all the produce venders in the city had invaded the house in a body. "Appuls, nunnions, tatoes, fwesh fish, nannies, nannies, nannies." The boyish voice rang noisily down the stairs, and a moment later a decided thud in the room above indicated that the sleeper and his couch had suddenly parted company. Mrs. Keith was so startled that she dropped the sketching portfolio she was holding, and Jessica, laughing merrily, hastened to open the door for the small mimic.

"Here are the pennies mamma left to get your bananas with, Harry," she said, and a moment later Master Harry was perched on the front gate, eagerly awaiting the coming of the dark-browed Italian who dispensed his favorite fruit.

"I feel sorry for poor Mr. Giovanni," remarked Jessica, as the swarthy foreigner paused at the gate

and selected the choicest of his fruit for the little boy, who was evidently a regular and favorite customer. "He lives only a couple of blocks below us, in a three-room shack that is a disgrace to the neighborhood; but as long as he manages to pay his rent the owner, who is a rich Italian, will not compel him to move."

"Why should he?" queried her companion. "He must live somewhere. Has he a family?"

"That's the worst of it," answered Jessica, in a tone of deep disgust. "His wife died a year or so ago, and she left five children, with only the oldest girl, who is about my age, to take care of the rest. The neighbors all say she cannot cook, and the children are always ragged, and never clean."

"Probably she has never been taught to sew or cook. You were saying only last night, that you wished you could do something to help some needy person. From what you have just told me you would not need to go more than two blocks to find a task ready set to your hand."

Jessica stared, then shook her head. "Mamma would never let me go inside the door, for fear of infection, I am certain," she said, decidedly. "You do not know, you cannot imagine, grandma, how hopelessly dirty they are. After his wife died, some members of the Associated Charities went there and offered to have his house cleaned up for him,

and, because he was so hard up, take his youngest boy, who was only about two years old, to the Children's Home; but Pietro would not listen to them at all."

"It does not seem to me that that was a good entering wedge, as we say," said Mrs. Keith. "Many of these foreigners are very sensitive. Then, too, don't you suppose he loves his children as much as your papa does you? What if your father were to lose his property in some way, get 'hard up,' as you say, and some charitably inclined persons were to offer to take Harry and bring him up in an orphan asylum?"

Jessica flushed slightly, then looked sober. "But how can anyone do things for them, gramsie, if they are too proud to allow it?" she questioned.

"It should be offered in the form of kindly help, not charity," returned grandmother, gravely. "Do the children go to school?"

"The oldest girl and boy don't. The boy works in a tobacco shop, and the girl keeps house. The two younger ones do, but the smallest one is not old enough."

"Let us walk down past their house this evening," proposed Mrs. Keith, after a few moments reflection. "I would like to see what poor people in Cleveland look like."

Jessica assented doubtfully; and Mrs. Keith went

to her room to dress for a party, to which she had been invited, at the Sheldon's. As both mother and grandma were to be away, Don had been permitted to use the car and take Jessica and Harry out to Lakewood for chestnuts.

Acting on Mrs. Keith's suggestion, and evading questions as to their destination, Jessica and her grandmother set out, after the late dinner, and strolled slowly past the Italian's house. They saw the fruit vender himself, working busily in a tiny garden at one side of the house, while near him the smallest child played with a dilapidated toy horse and wagon.

"What perfect lettuce for this time of year!" exclaimed the lady, in a tone intended to reach the gardener's ears. "I wonder if we might not buy a few leaves for the rabbits' breakfast."

The gardener came quickly forward. "Lettuce all nice, fresh," he said. "How much-a you like?"

"You are the same man that sold Harry Cameron such fine bananas this afternoon, I think," said Mrs. Keith, as she paused at the gate. "You have a fine garden for this time of year, and for a man who works away from home, too."

The Italian looked pleased, and opening the rickety gate invited the two to come inside, explaining in broken English that he did not have enough of a surplus in his garden to make it pay to take it to



market; but that the children sold small quantities occasionally in the immediate neighborhood. The lettuce, he added, was of a late planting, and as the weather had been cool and moist it had come on uncommonly well.

Mrs. Keith took a dime from her purse, and the man, directing one of the children to bring a paper sack, put up a generous quantity of the crisp, curly leaves. Jessica listened thoughtfully as her grandmother talked easily with him of the best way to plant and care for a fall garden, the most profitable vegetables to cultivate, and methods of saving them until well into the winter. She was evidently well-informed on the subject, and the gardener paid most intelligent attention.

"It is such a saving to have your own vegetables through the whole season," she commented, pleasantly. "It all helps in these days of high prices."

The Italian assented. "My wife, she dead now over a year," he said, sadly. "My girl, she not know much-a how cook," with a glance toward the nearest window where a young girl with a dark face, framed in a mass of untidy black hair, was looking out indifferently at the group in the little garden. "Me raise plenta spinach, garlic, tomat', onion—all help."

"Your daughter looks quite young. It must be hard for her to do the work for so many. Does she do their sewing, too?"

"She does-a much," giving the face in the window something like a look of approval. "Sometimes buy-a ready-made. Too cheap," in a tone of disgust. "Soon come all to pieces!"

Mrs. Keith's experienced eyes took in the family group, and a great wave of pity swept over her motherly soul. On a rude box in the rear of the lean-to which seemed to serve as a kitchen, the older boy was drawing, with a piece of charcoal, crude pictures of impossible trees and houses, for the amusement of the others. The youngest, having now cut his hand slightly on an old tin can with which he had been loading dirt into his wagon, set up a howl of dismay, whereupon the older sister came hurriedly out, and carried him within. The smaller children's clothes were of the coarsest, cheapest sort, and were unskilfully made, though with an evident attempt to follow the prevailing mode. The older girl's dress, of the ready-made type, was of the poorest quality and of tawdry appearance. The girl herself was undersized for her age, which her father informed his visitors was "past fourteen."

"Just about my age," remarked Jessica, and again fell thoughtfully silent.

"I am spending the winter with my daughter, Mrs. Cameron," Mrs. Keith explained, as she turned to go; "and as I am not very busy I think I would

like to get acquainted with your young housekeeper," with a smile toward the window where the girl was again seated. "I would be glad to help her with the younger children's clothes, and perhaps she would like me to come down sometimes to show her how to cook some simple, cheap dishes which you would all like. It would help to keep me in practice."

She did not wait for Mr. Giovanni to accept or reject this proposal, but added, "We shall want some more lettuce, perhaps tomorrow. When Mrs. Cameron sees how very nice this is, I think she will not be willing that the bunnies shall have it all."

She dropped some pennies in the toy cart as she departed, saying lightly to the small owner, "Now you can buy some hay for your horsie"; and was rewarded by seeing a dazzling smile chase the tears from the grimy face, while the father looked on decidedly pleased.

"Grandmother," said Jessica, as they walked slowly home through the gathering dusk, "I have a couple of good gingham house dresses that I have outgrown, but which I think are plenty large enough for Beatrice, that is, if she will take them," she added, doubtfully.

"To be sure she will take them," returned Mrs. Keith. "I will see to that. Do you know, Jessica, I cannot understand such poverty as theirs, in the midst of what you might call the over-abundance

which is all around them. It seems to me it is almost a reflection on the humanity of their wealthy neighbors."

"Don't you have any poor people like them out in Kansas?" queried Jessica.

"Not poor like this Italian family, not in our community," said Mrs. Keith, decidedly. "The citizens would be ashamed to have such poverty in their midst, and would get to work speedily to remedy such a state of affairs."

"How?"

"Well, the Civic Employment Bureau would provide the man with work which would bring him better wages than he could make peddling bananas. Then the Woman's Auxiliary of the same club would provide comfortable clothing for those smaller children until the father could do so. The Civic Social Club would see to it that that young girl attended the lessons on housekeeping which are kept up by a number of generous-minded men and women, assisted by a small fund from the town. These lessons are taught by expert teachers, and are attended by all classes who wish to benefit by the helpful instruction offered."

"But suppose he would not be helped," insisted Jessica, again. "Pietro was so very angry when the ladies went to him and offered to help him with money and clothes, and take one or two children



off his hands, that he threatened to shoot them; he really did. We girls have a Helping Hand Mission in our Sunday school," she added. "We do lots of charity."

"We will eliminate the word 'charity' from our plans for Mr. Giovanni," said Mrs. Keith, quietly, "and then, my Jessica, we shall see how quickly we shall get in touch with him and the little Giovannis. What does your mission society do?"

"Oh, we gather up flowers in summer, among our friends, or raise them ourselves, and take them to the city hospitals on visiting days; and we send magazines to the Old Ladies' Home, and carry toys and storybooks to the Children's Home. We met once to sew for the Foundlings' Home—we thought if we could make doll dresses we ought to be able to make them enough larger to do for babies—but we had no one to plan or cut out for us, so we gave it up."

"Couldn't you get your mothers interested enough to give you a boost?"

"I asked mine," replied Jessica, frankly, "but she said she couldn't give any more time to charitable organizations than she was giving, without neglecting her own family; and Margie's mother said it wasn't worth while for her to bother, for we girls never carried out anything like that that we undertook."

"Rather poor encouragement!" commented grandmother. "How many are in your club?"

"About ten. It is really just our Sunday-school class, but they don't all attend club meetings, when we have them, any more than they attend Sunday school. It's been worse than usual this summer, and Miss Vance, our teacher, gets quite discouraged about us, especially when only two or three seem able to get out at one time."

"Are they at home sick?" queried grandmother, demurely.

"Not a bit of it!" laughed Jessica. "They are all in what Don calls a state of 'rude health' most of the time; but in summer they are away from town, or out on motor excursions, and in winter it is too cold, or they are entertaining friends at home, or being entertained at some other girl's house. Mamma does not allow me to receive my girl friends on Sunday," a slight note of discontent creeping into her voice, "or go out to dinner; and papa will not take us out in the motor car on Sunday afternoon, unless we have been to Sunday school and church first. Mrs. Sheldon thinks he and mamma are a little old-fashioned about Sunday."

"That is certainly a pardonable failing, nowadays," approved Mrs. Keith. "I am glad they have not forgotten their early training."

"Do you think it is wrong to go motoring on

Sunday, grandma?" They had reached home, and, as the evening was unusually mild, they sat down in some wicker chairs on the porch.

"I am glad you asked me that question, dear, for it is getting to be such an important one in these days of the motor car, and the general Sabbath-breaking which its coming and its common use have certainly fostered. Let me answer it by telling you of a man in our little western town who owns a big touring car. Every Sunday afternoon when the weather is at all favorable, he fills this big car with some of the people in our community who do not own and seldom get to ride in a car, and there are plenty of them. One day it will be a number of old ladies, or old men; another time, a bunch of the coal miners' children; or, perhaps, the boys of his own Sunday-school class. He takes them out on the pleasant country roads, and sometimes into the woods, where he and his wife often spread a lunch which has been prepared for him by the town's Social Club, an organization which has for its sole object the matter of seeing that the young people of the community have a good time, and have it in the right way. These Sunday motor parties are managed so easily and graciously, that nobody thinks of refusing to go, or considers them, in any sense, acts of charity. This man's wife is a fine reader; and she often goes with him, and reads to the company

from some suitable book, in some quiet country nook. This man spends most of his Sunday afternoons in this way in pleasant weather; and in winter he and his wife often entertain a group of children or young people at their home on Sunday afternoon, with a little musicale or a story-telling hour."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Jessica. "Don and I often find Sunday afternoon tiresome, when it is not pleasant enough to be out; but we usually manage to have an interesting book on hand."

"Now let us look at the other side a moment," continued Mrs. Keith. "When the National League played its closing game of ball in Kansas City, a year or two ago, there were five families from one church in our town that left for the city before four o'clock in the morning. The pews in that church surely looked deserted that day. None of these people, however, gained admission to the ball field which, before they reached the city, was filled to overflowing with those who had not been obliged to drive eighty miles to see a Sunday ball game; so they spent their time in the parks and picture shows. As the hotels were crowded, some of them secured very poor accommodations that night, and when they reached home, which was not until late the next day, they were all tired out and disgusted."



"Papa would say, 'served them right,' " laughed Jessica.

"Then again, last summer, a motor party of nearly one hundred people from a city fifty miles away made what they called a 'Sunday sociability-run' to the large town near us. They arrived in town with their noise and dust just as people were gathering for the morning service at the different churches. They were taken by a committee of leading citizens to the hotels for dinner, then to the park for speeches and a band concert, after which the local motorists escorted them in a run to the country club, two miles out, where refreshments were again served to the visitors before they left for home. The town was in confusion all day. Those of the citizens who took no part were deprived of their usual rest and quiet, as well as those of the large company of caterers, waiters, and other workers who had to stay at their posts of duty to help entertain the guests. If the Commandments are still in force, Jessica," concluded Mrs. Keith, gravely, "which of the two classes of motorists I have told you about 'remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy'?"

"I think I can see, grandmother," replied Jessica, thoughtfully, "that there are right ways and wrong ways to use motor cars on Sunday."

"Margaret," said Mrs. Keith the next afternoon, as she sat with her son and daughter on the veranda while the children exhibited the jack rabbits to the groups of curious passers-by, "why do not you and Richard break up your children's sporting habits?"

Mrs. Cameron looked inquiringly at her mother, and her husband asked gravely, "Such as what?"

"The matinee fever, the moving-picture craze, and the taste for too much light reading," promptly replied Mrs. Keith.

"I knew something of great weight was on your mind, mother," laughed her son. "I never knew you to exclaim 'Margaret,' in that impressive tone of voice, that it was not the prelude to important revelations. If I may be excused for saying so, however, I think it is most unfair to fire such a gun as that at us, at close range, when we are both entirely out of ammunition."

"I am very much in earnest, Dick," assured his mother.

"So am I. Madge and I have discussed this question many times, but we have never yet been able to find a remedy for our children's 'minds diseased.' "

"Turn the currents of the diseased minds into new and more healthful channels," she suggested.

"I believe we could do that with Jessica," agreed Mrs. Cameron, "if it were not for Marjorie. She

seems to have a passion for picture shows and juvenile theatricals. Jessica can scarcely be shut away from companionship with her mates on Saturdays, and the fad seems to be more pronounced this fall than usual. Nothing else seems to fill the bill."

"Will not the painting lessons you so kindly offered to give her, fill the aching void for Jessica?" inquired Mr. Cameron. "Might they not be made to serve the double purpose of instruction and amusement?"

"That is why I planned them for Saturday afternoon," returned his mother. "And now, if I may have your permission and Madge's to include Miss Marjorie in the lessons, the first step in a needful crusade will have been taken."

Both son and daughter gave a hearty assent to this proposal. "I notice Don has not been patronizing the Saturday theatricals lately," added Mrs. Cameron, hopefully. "He says they are not interesting any more; and I am hoping that when Jessica gets a little older she will see them in the same light."

"As Don says sometimes, 'Don't get it in your head that way,' Madge," returned her mother. "Even if she does, there will be, by that time, some fellow of Don's size but perhaps not his good sense, to make it interesting for her. Take my word for it, my children, the only thing to do is to get that

whole bunch of juveniles diverted to some safer and saner amusement."

"Easier said than done," sighed her daughter. "I confess I have spent many anxious hours over this matter."

"Why not have mother work up some scheme in this direction?" suggested Mr. Cameron to his wife. "She must do something this winter to keep from stagnating. I half believe she has a plan already in view. What do you say, mother? Do you accept the commission?"

"As the politicians say, 'What is there in it?'" laughed Mrs. Keith. "Perhaps, like them, I also have a price."

"Name it," promptly rejoined her son. "If you can succeed in breaking up our children's 'sporting tendencies,' as you call them, your price shall be paid to the uttermost farthing, and you shall receive our thanks and blessing besides."

"What are you going to do with that discarded storehouse which stands on the alley, when you move it, as I heard you say you intended doing?" she quietly inquired.

Mrs. Cameron looked at her mother in mute surprise for a moment, as if in sudden doubt of her sanity; but when she opened her mouth to speak, her husband slipped his hand over it.

"Give her her head, Madge," he said gravely.



"I am convinced now, that this attack on us was premeditated, and that there is 'method in her madness,' though slow wits like ours may not immediately perceive it. I know of old, and so do you, that if she once sets her head to carry through some desired measure, it will go through, though the heavens fall. Do you remember the time, mother," he added, "that you cured our bird dog of eating eggs by shutting her jaws together over one filled with red pepper? I bet my best knife with the hired man, on that occasion, that you would be too chicken-hearted to do it; but I lost the knife, for you did it, and then went to your room and cried for an hour!"

Mrs. Keith made a little face at her son's untimely jest. "There will be no such sorrowful consequences, I assure you, attending the results of a campaign against what I believe is a positive evil for a sensitive, active mind like Jessica's."

"Sensitive, perhaps," agreed Jessica's father. "Active? I am afraid I will have to be shown, though since your arrival she certainly seems to be waking up."

"It is the storybooks from the public library, and the picture shows, and the sensational children's dramas, that are working her mental undoing," quietly continued Mrs. Keith. "She tells me that she has read as many as five storybooks, as she

calls them, in one week, and attended as many picture shows or other places of amusement. Living in such an atmosphere of excitement, how can she have time or strength for healthy mental activities?"

"I know that she has been out, and has read a great deal more during the past vacation than I wished her to do," sighed Jessica's mother. "But when school began, I put the ban on evenings out during the week, and have checked it as much as possible on Saturdays. She is allowed but one library book a week, which she gets Friday evening and manages to finish by Sunday night."

"It is my opinion that mother is right, and that we did not put the strings on these evils soon enough, or pull them often enough," said Mr. Cameron, decidedly. "But it is never too late to mend; and now for your reform measures, mother mine. It goes without saying that Madge and I are yours to command; also, the storehouse."

"You are too absurd, Dick," declared his wife. "What can mother possibly want with that old storehouse?"

"Only Heaven and mother know," answered her husband, solemnly, "and neither one has vouchsafed me any information on the subject, as yet. But I am not disposed to be curious. If she sees fit, mother may inveigle the whole restless mob of neighborhood juveniles into it at one P. M. on

Saturday, and turn the key until late bedtime. She even has my permission to use the edifice to start an opposition show of her own—one with a sound moral attached—which I have no doubt she is competent to do. By the way, mother, where will you have this advance agent of your reform measures delivered; for I think the workmen will be ready to begin on the new garage within a week?"

"I intend," answered his mother, with emphasis, "to have it moved down the street two blocks, and around the corner, and set in front of that shack which the Italian fruit vender shelters himself and five children in, and calls home. I wish first, however, to see the owner, lease the place for a year, also the two lots adjoining, and then present the lease to the present tenant. With two additional lots for his gardening ventures and no rent to pay, he will, I think, be self-sustaining by that time. Before the building is moved, the laddies of Donald's manual-training class will ceil it, put in some windows for me, and do whatever else is necessary to make it fit to live in. When this is accomplished, that matinee circle of young ladies will, if I am not mistaken, furnish it with cast-off furniture from their own wealthy homes. Then they will get busy and fit out those half-naked children with winter clothing—all with my assistance, of course. In performing this labor of love for the poor, which

we seem to have in our midst even in Cleveland, I hope they will find pleasure in something higher than impossible pictured romances of western life, or juvenile reproductions of sensational French plays. This is as far as my plans are laid at present," she added, with a little laugh at her own earnestness, "but I wish them kept secret until I am ready for their further execution."

Mr. Cameron thrust his hands in his pockets and whistled softly. "Poor Pietro Giovanni is our neighborhood problem," he said. "But it is rather tough on us, isn't it, Madge, that its solution should have been deferred until Kansas brains and energy had to come to the rescue?" Then, laying aside all jest, he continued, "I have thought for some time that something should be done for him; but I am a very busy man, with many problems of my own to solve. I think the Municipal Aid Bureau, or some such organization, tried to extend the helping hand when his wife died, but their efforts did not pan out, somehow."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Keith, with as near an approach to sarcasm as her kindly nature permitted, "I understand from Jessica that they offered to clean his dirty house for him, and transfer one or two of his children to an orphan asylum—proposals which any man of spirit would naturally resent. He is a hard-working and intelligent man," she added,



"and with a little encouragement will make a first-class citizen."

"I am afraid mother thinks we have been a very careless set of neighbors," said Mrs. Cameron to her husband, "as indeed we have; and I am glad she has roused us to a sense of our responsibilities to these poor people, as well as to our own children and their companions. I am sure your plan will work out perfectly, mamsie dear," she added, "and you may use the house for your fellow-workers any time, and count on my assistance whenever you wish it."

The children appeared at that moment, and begged for a motor ride, so the subject was dropped. But Mrs. Keith lost no time the next morning in seeking an interview with the owner of Pietro's "shack," whom she found to be an Italian of some means, quite kindly disposed toward his countryman. Her interest and her gracious manner soon secured his consent to her plans, and he also offered to move the addition to its new location free of charge. In view of the new building, a low rent was agreed upon, which Mrs. Keith paid in advance, and the lease was promptly made out which was to lift the first burden from the shoulders of the unfortunate foreigner.

## CHAPTER V

### GETTING BETTER ACQUAINTED

"I HAVE what I think is a very fine scheme to propose to you, girlie," said grandmother to Jessica the next night, after lessons were over, and the bedtime chat was well under way.

"You are a great schemer, gramsie," returned Jessica, gayly. "But I am a lot more stuck on your schemes than I supposed, a month ago, it was possible to be. So spring it."

"Thanks for the compliment. Well then, how would you like to have Marjorie share your drawing and painting lessons this winter?"

A sudden flush came over the girlish face. Did grandmother know or guess half how vexed and jealous Marjorie had been over that one blissful Saturday afternoon, when she had been left alone to choose her own pleasure, while Jessica, joyfully, and all forgetful of her chum, delved at grandmother's side into the mysteries of "washes" and "tints," of "chromes" and "madders," "vanishing point and perspective"? And when, as the result of the afternoon's painstaking, she had taken for her

teacher's inspection the following Monday a half-blown wild rose with two pink-tinted buds and a few perfect leaves, and had received unstinted praise from Miss Dunn, who was no inferior artist herself, neither a flatterer—did grandmother realize the triumph of her granddaughter's secret heart that perhaps here was something, something really worth while, that Marjorie could not crow over her about, something in which she had no part, and could boast no superior knowledge?

"I—don't know. I—hadn't thought about it. Why?" she stammered, with a look of doubt.

It was perhaps as well that the questioner could not know, just then, how skilfully her companion interpreted that doubtful look and tone.

"It could be easily managed, if you care to do so," replied Mrs. Keith, in a matter-of-fact tone, as she took up her tatting from the table. "As your lessons would be alike, it would give you the benefit of comparison and interchange of ideas, as well as companionship, and perhaps be a pleasure to your chum. I think you said she had artistic tendencies."

"But she learns everything so much faster than I do, and knows so much about water color already, don't you suppose she will do so much better than I, that we will not get on together, that is, not keep together in our lessons at all?"

Mrs. Keith gave a fleeting glance at the down-cast, wistful face. "I cannot imagine how any one could 'get on' any faster than you have done so far," she replied.

"But Marjorie is a real artist, gramsie," still protested Jessica. "She gets the highest grades in our room in water color and drawing, and once last fall, when we went to a trial shorthand lesson, just for fun, Marjorie made two copies of hers, and on one paper she had the funniest things—goblins, and kewpies, and everything you can think of, that she had made just by adding a few strokes to her shorthand characters. Miss Dunn said she should study 'caricature illustration'—whatever that is."

Mrs. Keith, recalling Marjorie's gay, girlish quickness, and aptitude for mimicry, mentally approved Miss Dunn's judgment; but she said nothing, and presently Jessica continued:

"And one day Miss Dunn was standing by her table, and Marjorie drew her face on the black-board, a profile view, and it was so natural that we all recognized it when we came in; but instead of being cross, Miss Dunn praised the drawing, and said she 'was proud to have been an inspiration for a budding genius'; and everybody laughed, but she meant it."

Still the busy worker opposite remained silent, quietly counting threads, and Jessica sighed softly.



"I know she would like it, though, even if she did have to give up her Saturday matinee," she said after a moment, as though in answer to some argument of her inner self. "She was real fussy last Saturday when I said I did not mind missing the Cinderella operetta, for my painting lesson was so interesting. Then she said she had missed me dreadfully, and didn't care if she never went to a matinee again!"

"It would be a good thing for Marjorie," commented Mrs. Keith, "for it would take her mind partly away from things of lesser importance, and perhaps be the first step toward her future success as a real artist."

"Is it to be as I say, grandmother?" inquired Jessica, doubtfully. "About taking the lessons, I mean."

"Certainly. You did not think that I would invite her to share your lessons without your approval, did you?"

"Then may I have till tomorrow to think it over?"

"Have as long as you like, dear. Don't think it over at all, if it does not seem that it would be a pleasure to you."

Jessica's bedtime visit was cut short that night. She went away to her own room presently, to "have it out with herself," as she said to herself; but her mind was in a turmoil of uncertainty, and she was

glad when her mother appeared, and she could make known to that dear counsellor her doubts and misgivings.

"It would be awfully selfish in me to want to keep them all to myself, when gramsie is willing to teach Margie, too, wouldn't it? Margie would be so pleased too; but she does so much better than I in all our studies, that I simply could not bear to have her ahead of me all the time in this."

"Don't let her get ahead then," advised mamma, smiling. "Grandma thinks you have much talent yourself, little daughter. If competition is the life of trade, why should it not be an inducement to excel in matters of art? Think, too, if you can forget your own feelings in the matter, of the advantage to Margie of contact with such a friend as grandma every Saturday afternoon this winter. You have her all the time."

This remark seemed to bring a sudden fear to Jessica's heart. "She says she may have to go home the first of March. Do you suppose she will?" she inquired, anxiously.

"Not if we can pull the strings hard enough to hold her," was mother's decided response. "But if she must, that need not prevent our enjoying her while she is with us, or giving others a chance to do so. Remember your class motto, little daughter."

"'In honor preferring one another,' " murmured

Jessica, sleepily. "That's just awfully hard, sometimes, mamsie."

But with the drowsily murmured prayer, "Bless my friends and make me a comfort to them," Jessica evidently conquered herself. For as Mrs. Keith turned from the window the next morning, after taking a last, long breath of autumn air, a sunny face, from which all the shadows of the previous night had fled, was raised to hers for a morning kiss, and a voice without a ripple of regret in it said, "I made up my mind before I went to sleep, gramsie, and I am glad Margie can have the lessons too. Will you ask her today?"

Mrs. Keith drew the precious granddaughter into a very tender embrace, and did not answer for a moment. Then she said, "I will ask her mother this afternoon. But I shall not ask Marjorie at all, for that shall be your pleasure. I was not mistaken in you, darling. You are pure gold!"—which was very sweet praise, indeed, to come from grandmother's lips, and made Jessica inwardly resolve that there should be nothing but the most generous rivalry between Margie and herself in the new arrangement.

Monday morning had found Mrs. Keith up bright and early for the standing engagement with Donald and his lessons, to which she looked forward with much pleasure. It was only half past six when she

entered the library, but he was there before her, poring over his geometry, the one study he really disliked.

“ ‘Since the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equivalent to the sum of the squares of the other two sides, if the equal sides are each forty rods long, how many acres of grazing ground will the larger square furnish a jack rabbit?’ ” she propounded, gayly.

Donald looked up queerly. “Do you understand geometry, grandmother?”

“Some,” she replied, smiling.

“That’s the very proposition, ‘barrin’ the rabbit part,’ as an Irishman would say, that swamped me in my last quiz. That is, it set me back five points. I thought I was up on it too; but it floored me when I came up against it in the exam, and I don’t understand it well yet. I don’t believe a fellow could remember the demonstration a week, anyway, no matter how much he exercised his gray matter on it.”

“That’s where you’re off, laddie. I have not seen the inside of a geometry for many moons; but I think I can show you.”

She walked to the library blackboard, picked up a crayon, quickly constructed her figure, and went slowly but correctly through with the demonstration of the theorem. Something in the simplicity of her line of reasoning smoothed away the diffi-



culties of the theorem for the young mathematician, and thereafter, whenever he reached the "limit" with his one difficult study, he invariably sought grandmother for a few minutes, and seldom found her wanting in "relief measures," as he called her help.

"What's doing next?" she queried, as his brow cleared. "I was in hopes we might have time to initiate our labors this morning with a ten-minute run to the beach. The morning is too perfect to spend it all indoors."

"I am all done, except a paraphrase of the first two stanzas of 'Thanatopsis,' and I can manage that at school."

"We can dig that out on our way."

"But we cannot carry a book very well," objected Don.

"No, but we can use the set of ready-reference tablets which I always carry with me. I mean the pages of Memory," she added, as Donald looked mystified. "I am quite certain 'Thanatopsis' is spread out on them, as it is one of my favorite poems."

The avenue was deserted at this early hour, and, as they walked briskly along, they discussed the poem, and Mrs. Keith unfolded to her grandson some of the beauties of Bryant's masterpiece hitherto undiscovered by him. They returned by

way of the Italian's house, and she took this opportunity to acquaint him with her plans for its addition, with some small misgiving as to his coöperation.

Much to her satisfaction, she found him heartily in sympathy with her movement to increase the comfort of these foreign neighbors. "Our Manual teacher, Mr. Hall, is a trump!" he remarked, with boyish enthusiasm, "and will oversee the work for us, I'm sure. When we wanted our new 'gym' finished ahead of contract time so we could use it for the finals in athletics last spring, and the contractor couldn't get extra workmen, Mr. Hall gave five evenings after school, and got five other fellows to help besides. He is always doing things like that."

The two entered the dining-room glowing with life and color. Jessica, who had only just risen, gave her brother a half-jealous glance, as he took his place at the table.

"You have the nicest hour of grandmother's time, Don," she said. "I am almost too tired to enjoy my lessons at night. How will you trade?"

"Not for a kingdom to boot!" declared Donald. "We have been holding all sorts of early morning communion with 'Nature and her visible forms' and I have added another word to my already extensive Greek vocabulary."

“What?” interrogated his sister.

“Thanatopsis, ‘a view of death.’ I never knew what the word meant until this morning. Wouldn’t grandmother and I make a pair of healthy, respectable looking ‘deaders’ this morning? I almost believe I could write a ‘pome’ myself. I feel chock full of fresh air and inspiration!”

“You evidently have not let ‘thoughts of the last bitter hour come like a blight over your spirit’ this morning,” laughed Mr. Cameron. “A dose of your new tonic wouldn’t be a bad thing for mamma,” he added, with a glance at his wife’s face, which lacked the glow of her mother’s.

“Just what I have been thinking,” affirmed Mrs. Keith; “and tomorrow morning, if Don is willing to postpone our feast of reason till after breakfast, and Jessica will volunteer to take temporary charge of the Kindergarten,” with a glance at Harry’s rosy face, “I shall rattle around in mamma’s place and be Nora’s assistant to set table and bake muffins, while you take mamma out for a morning spin.”

“Bright idea!” approved Mr. Cameron; and though the new program did not receive a very warm endorsement from mamma at first, it was carried out on pleasant mornings for several weeks. Jessica found a morning round with her merry little brother a very effective eye-opener for herself, and Nora,

with her usual good humor, raised no objection to the new arrangement with Mrs. Keith's efficient help.

It was remarkable how soon and completely the new member of the Cameron family fell into its ways, and how swiftly she walked into the hearts of its members. Harry soon became her shadow, and "dranma" seemed never too absorbed in anything else to give the little fellow the companionship he so enjoyed. There had been an unusually strong attachment between mother and daughter, and the reunion, after the long separation, was very pleasant for both.

"Mamma and grandma just visit all the time," commented Jessica, one day. "I don't see what they find to talk about; and I never knew papa to be at home so many nights in succession, or to be so jolly as he has been since grandmother came."

This was true. Mr. Cameron enjoyed to the full the evening reunion with his family, and her mother's help and presence added much to his wife's spirits at night; so that, whether the evening was spent in instructive or amusing games with the children, given over to the pleasures of music, or to the discussion of newspaper or magazine articles, it seemed to go on wings.

Between grandmother and Donald there was at once the most royal good fellowship; the beginning



of this, however, dating back to the days he had spent with her on the Kansas ranch.

But it was Jessica—Jessica the dreamer, the indolent—who was most strongly influenced by this new force that had come into her home, the mature personality of the newcomer acting on her young life like the magic of old wine. Encouraged by Mrs. Keith's gentle oversight and timely assistance, Jessica soon lost her dislike for her home tasks, which had never been burdensome save in her mind, and the thought of the painting lesson awaiting her on Saturday spurred her on to fresh exertion whenever she felt like lagging.

"Friday morning dawned," as Donald declared, "almost on the heels of Sunday night"; and as the family rose from its breakfast table it was treated to a fresh surprise from the Kansas relative.

"Jessica," she inquired, "how many young ladies compose the select Four Hundred which you are pleased to designate the 'Avenue Gang'?"

Jessica flushed slightly as Don laughed at the question, but, as she had already learned that grandmother never "teased," she replied promptly, "Just ten, now, including myself."

"Well," returned Mrs. Keith, deliberately, "I shall be obliged if you will invite them today to be your guests and mine, at my expense, to an after-

noon performance of 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' tomorrow at the Orpheum theater."

The eyes of the entire family were suddenly focused on the speaker.

"I have been in Cleveland nearly three weeks," she added, in a slightly injured tone, "and nobody has invited me to attend a picture show or a matinee; so I have concluded to invite myself. As I am new to city ways, I shall require a chaperon, and, as I am getting on toward my second childhood, several might not be amiss."

"But gramsie," protested Jessica, feeling suddenly that somebody had, perhaps, been lacking in hospitality, "we thought you did not approve of picture shows or matinees. I am sure papa said so."

"Papa has another guess coming," declared grandmother, with a merry twinkle in her eye. "Both are all right in their place. How am I to know whether I approve what you have here, never having seen them? I would ask Don to accompany us, but I am certain he would be prostrated with embarrassment in a feminine 'line-party,' so I shall save him to be my escort to *The Merchant of Venice*, which I see is billed to appear in Cleveland soon."

Jessica still believed her grandmother was joking. "There are so many of us, grandmother, and then, too, I was to have my first painting lesson with Marjorie tomorrow."

"I have been staying at home rather closely for me, so I have quite a little of my last month's allowance left," insisted Mrs. Keith, with a sly wink at her son. "The painting lesson with the double number can be sandwiched into the morning hours, or postponed for a week. Nothing will satisfy my positive craving for some unusual excitement but a matinee. So don't forget! Just an informal invitation from me to your girl friends will be sufficient. I am certain you will know how to manage it."

"Thank you, grandmother, I am sure they will be delighted!" and Jessica went away to prepare for school, still slightly mystified, but wholly pleased. Mrs. Keith drew Donald into the library for a short private conference concerning her Italians; Harry went in search of refreshments for the rabbits; and Mrs. Cameron gave one look at her husband's face and burst into a hearty laugh.

"As the children say, 'What do you know about that,' Dick?" she exclaimed. "What will that mother of ours be up to next?"

"Take my advice of last Sunday, Madge," he answered, wiping his eyes, "and don't lay a straw in her way. I think I can see, however, what she has up her sleeve now. She feels that she must be better acquainted with that bunch of youngsters before she can handle them successfully, and she is only

moving her fighting forces to their own ground. Believe me, she will wind the whole ball of juvenile yarn around her blessed fingers, before the winter is half over."

"You think, then, that she is only making arrangements to fight fire with fire, as we used to do in early days in Kansas?" she queried, doubtfully. "I only hope, Dick, the end will justify the means."

"Trust mother for that," he replied, as he sought his coat and hat. "She seems to have the situation under perfect control."

Mrs. Keith had returned Mrs. Sheldon's first call, which had been prompt. She had also been entertained by that lady as guest of honor at an elaborate dinner party; and now, with the double purpose of making acknowledgments for this courtesy, and of asking Mrs. Sheldon to allow Marjorie to share Jessica's art lessons, she made a lengthy call at the Sheldon home. In preferring her request she stipulated only that Margie should furnish her own material, and be present at every lesson in order that the two girls might be kept together in their work. Mrs. Sheldon eagerly accepted the conditions, saying that Marjorie had shown quite an inclination for art, but that her father had decided it would be a waste of time and money at her age. "She is showing a tendency toward theatrical life lately," sighed Mrs. Sheldon,



"which quite frightens me, though her father says she will outgrow it. She is crazy over matinees, and anything is welcome which will tend to divert her from them, though I don't suppose one Saturday performance more or less will matter much."

"Mrs. Cameron and I think that one more or less does matter very much, Mrs. Sheldon," answered her visitor, earnestly. "While I am here, I expect to have much time for the children, and it is our desire to draw them away as much as possible from these questionable amusements. We hope to provide Jessica with so many home pleasures this winter that she will not care for public entertainments of the matinee class, which, we have decided, after the coming Saturday she must give up altogether for the present. Since she and Marjorie are such warm friends, and we have no desire to interfere with that friendship, we should like your coöperation in our plans for the coming winter."

Before taking her leave, Mrs. Keith seconded Jessica's invitation for the coming Saturday afternoon, giving as her reason for the proposed theater party the one her son had shrewdly guessed, that she had "thought this a good way to become acquainted with the young people."

Mrs. Sheldon was much pleased, as well as amused. "You have certainly made a hit with our young people, Mrs. Keith," she said, as her guest took

her departure. "You have my warmest wishes for success in carrying out your plans, and shall have my assistance, also, in every possible way."

The "line-party" of laughing, chattering girls which the polite usher showed to their seats on the following afternoon somewhat resembled a bevy of gayly colored butterflies as they fluttered, swarmed, and finally settled in their places in the brilliantly lighted theater. Mrs. Keith in their midst, faultlessly dressed in plain but elegant black, attracted more than one glance to her charming manner and refined face; and Jessica's heart swelled with pride as the girls clustered around her grandmother, to become better acquainted, and to show, in every possible way, their appreciation of her courtesy.

She was thoroughly acquainted with the book which was the subject of the drama, and her quiet comments, between the acts, brought out the best features of this excellent story for children. At the close of the play, "The Holy City," presented in moving pictures, with song accompaniment, was also enjoyed by her party of guests, who pronounced the entire performance "too lovely for anything."

Marjorie, in discussing the afternoon's entertainment at breakfast next morning, was in high feather. "You cannot object to my going to matinees any more now, mamma," she observed, loftily. "We

girls have a plan to get Mrs. Keith to chaperone us for Saturday evenings too, sometimes, and I am sure she will be willing to go quite often. It certainly does look better to have a chaperone, especially when you can have a dignified, dressy one like her."

Mrs. Sheldon had discussed Mrs. Keith's recent call, and her proposed plans for the winter, with her husband; and she now gave an amused glance in his direction before replying. "You have my permission," she said, "to attend any entertainment you wish under Mrs. Keith's escort, Margie, if you will agree not to ask permission to attend the theater at any other time."

There was an odd note in her mother's voice, and her father's smile was slightly puzzling, so Miss Margie demurred a little. "She might not be able to go when I would wish to go very much. Of course I could go with the girls then, as I have been doing, though she does make you have an elegant time. I never enjoyed a play so much in my life; and I don't like the book much, either—Lord Fauntleroy is so much of a sissy-boy. Oh, yes, and she took us into a swell café near the theater, after the play and treated us to ices before we came home."

"I am glad you enjoyed it," put in her father, dryly, "for if I don't miss my guess, it will be the last matinee this winter, at which you will enjoy Mrs. Keith's 'dignified, dressy presence.'" He

laughed as he rose from the table, but refused to explain himself further.

"Gramsie," said Jessica, the next afternoon, as together they turned the pages of a portfolio of Italian landscapes from which Mrs. Keith had taken several studies, "I had an idea yesterday."

"She is having two or three a day, regularly now, grandmother," supplemented Donald, from the library couch. "I think she absorbs them from you, for she is at your elbow morning, noon, and night."

Mrs. Keith smiled, though she shook her head reprovingly at her facetious grandson. "What was the idea, Jessica?" she asked.

Jessica turned the pages rapidly until she came to a view of Lake Sorrento, which Mrs. Keith had copied before coming to Cleveland.

"You remember you said you did not like your copy of this study, that it did not look finished, somehow; and I thought yesterday, when we were down to Pietro's for lettuce, that it might make it prettier to put that little boy's figure on the beach, picking up shellfish, as you say the Italian children often do, or even just playing in the sand. He is so round and smooth, he would be really handsome if he were not so dirty."

"It would not be necessary to paint the dirt, you know. That is a very good idea, and shows that



you have artistic perceptions, as we say. If I could get little Guido to 'stay put' long enough to get a few sketches of him, I think it could be managed."

"If we could get Pietro to let us bring him up here some night after school, we might wash him up and put him out in the sand pile to play with Harry, and you could make some sketches of him while he played, couldn't you?" she asked, doubtfully.

Donald clapped his hands approvingly. "Put them both into the picture," he suggested. "Harry's tow-colored Scotch pate would make a swell contrast to Guido's black mop and 'dark, rich beauty,' as they say in novels. Then, rename the picture, 'Italy and America.' I wonder if they would be harmonious?"

"In the picture?" suggested Jessica, slyly. "That is what we are discussing, isn't it?"

Don's only response to this criticism was to thrust his tongue into his cheek, and subside again into *Heroic Deeds of Great Americans*; but grandmother evidently found Jessica's suggestion a pleasing one, to the extent of making it serve some purpose of her own regarding the "Giovanni tribe," as Don called Pietro's household. The next afternoon, as soon as the children had returned to school, she walked down to the Italian's house.

It was a perfect day in late September, and, after a few minutes' chat with Beatrice, Mrs. Keith asked

that she might borrow little Guido and take him up to play in Harry's sand pile, adding that Jessica would bring him back as soon as she came from school.

The sister's reception of this proposal astonished and dismayed her visitor. The two were getting quite well acquainted, Mrs. Keith having made several visits to Beatrice unaccompanied, that she might more easily win her confidence. The girl had accepted, with broken but sincere thanks, the slightly worn gingham which Jessica had outgrown, and, as the girl was much more careful of her appearance since this addition to her wardrobe, Mrs. Keith had felt that she was making decided progress in her friendly efforts.

But today the girl had scarcely waited for the lady to make her request before breaking forth in a storm of dissent. Snatching up her little brother, who was playing near the visitor's feet with a wonderful spinning top which she had brought to him, Beatrice thrust him hastily into the only room which afforded a lock, hurriedly turned the key in spite of his loud protestations, and, returning, broke forth in another volume of Italian invective.

It was well that Pietro himself came into the house at that moment, for poor Beatrice, thinking the proposal to borrow her brother only part of a plan to get possession and deliver him over to the dreaded

"Society," was still pouring forth a passionate, one-sided argument, when her father appeared, noted the perplexed expression on the visitor's face, and quieted his daughter's tirade. Mrs. Keith gently explained to him the object of her visit.

"You know Sorrento, beautiful Sorrento?" he inquired, eagerly. "I lived, I was born, near it."

Pietro soon succeeded in quieting his daughter's fears that her brother was in danger of abduction, released the small victim of the misunderstanding, who was still screaming in the next room, and apologized for Beatrice's rudeness.

The next morning Mrs. Keith took the little picture down to show to Beatrice and her father, also a fine print of the same beautiful lake, which she gave to Beatrice to put upon the wall. In response to the artist's repeated invitation, the girl herself brought the small model to the Cameron home the following afternoon, a dreamy day in Indian summer. Carrying out Jessica's suggestion, they turned him loose with Harry in the mound of clean sand near the garage, to disport himself as seemed good unto him; while Mrs. Keith, seated on a near-by garden bench, with Beatrice an interested onlooker, made several sketches of his graceful body, and round, expressive face. This done, she persuaded Beatrice to go into the house to inspect some of her pictures, and the two went upstairs together.

They had been within for some time, and the children were arriving from school, when a mingled wail and roar came up from the back yard. This revived all Beatrice's fears, and sent Mrs. Keith scurrying to the rear hall window.

The sound of Donald's hearty, boyish laugh, echoing from the back porch, quieted her alarm, and the scene from the upper window had the effect of causing her to join in the laughter. Growing weary of the sand pile, little Guido had turned his attention to the jack rabbits. The latter were making pantomime performances for the early supper which Harry was allowed to give them only under Donald's direction, as he often overdid the matter of rations. Knowing nothing better to do to check their mute appeals, such as standing on their hind legs, or scratching the ground violently with their forefeet, the small Italian shied a handful of sand at them with so much skill that they immediately retreated into the garage, their ready refuge when frightened.

This was too much for Harry. An affront to the bunnies was an insult to himself; and almost before the second rabbit had disappeared into the covert, a handful of sand, hurled by the small owner, smote the offender full in the face.

There was no further waiting for a declaration of war, as Don declared afterward, he having come on



the scene just in time to witness the first act in the breach of peace. Within a minute, the sand fort which the two had erected, was a mass of ruins from Guido's sudden, backward fall therein. As soon as he could recover his feet and his wits, the air became filled with flying sand, vigorous Italian and shrill-voiced American protests, as the opposing forces hurled the stinging sand at each other as fast as their childish fists could gather it up. This soon became too tame; and the respective sons of Italy and America were pounding each other with vigor and venom, when Donald, laughing until he was almost incapable of effort, reached the small combatants, separated them, and led them away to the house to wash the sand from their eyes and ears.

In the brief but fierce close of the engagement, Guido's little cotton blouse, under the rapid action of Harry's fingers, suffered as many rents as a battle flag at the close of a fierce charge. A truce was patched up by means of an outgrown jersey of Harry's, which Jessica hastily produced and had Beatrice put on the small warrior at once. Beatrice herself showed no concern after the first spasm of fright; it was evident that at home she was accustomed to discords.

With a handful of cookies to further cement the bonds of peace, Beatrice hurried her young charge homeward, after assuring the assembled family

that they had both had a "verra good time," which was too much for Don, and he retreated into the house to indulge in another spasm of laughter.

On the Monday evening following the matinee party Marjorie was invited to take dinner with Jessica. When the meal was over, and the two girls curled up together in the bay window for a cozy chat until Jessica's lesson hour arrived, the plan for the joint painting lesson was finally unfolded, Mrs. Sheldon having preserved silence until further notice, and grandmother having advised Jessica to wait a few days before asking her chum, to be sure she would not decide to change her mind.

"I've got something splendid to tell you, if you think you would like to do it," she began, "but it would spoil your Saturdays with the other girls."

"What is it?" queried Marjorie, expectantly.

"Grandmother said she would like you to share my drawing and painting lessons this winter, if you didn't mind giving the time," returned Jessica, going straight to the point. "She got your mother's consent last week, and she didn't have to wait long for mine," with a loving glance at Margie's pleased but doubtful face.

"You don't mean it!" was the incredulous response. "Sure thing, I'd like it better than anything else I know. Did your grandmother really mean it?"

"Of course; but they will be from two to four every Saturday, and that won't let you go to anything at all on Saturday afternoons."

"I don't care. Those old shows are getting tiresome, anyway. Did Mamma say I could? You know I'd rather be with you, even if I do like a matinee. Say, kid, you don't know how much I envy you your lovely grandmother, and so do all the other girls!"

Jessica laughed gayly. The process of widening the painting lessons to include her chum did not promise to be so very painful after all. "Well, she seems to be big enough to go around part of the time at least, and you may have half of her at least two hours every Saturday afternoon. Let's go upstairs and find her, and have her tell you about the lessons."

They sought grandmother's room, where they found her in the western window transferring the colors of a gorgeous autumn sunset as rapidly as possible to a block of water-color paper. When the last rosy tints had vanished, the artist, having secured a very creditable outline of the sky coloring and cloud formation, the three had an interesting talk on art in general; and before Marjorie took her leave plans for the art lessons had been fully completed, and it was arranged that she was to begin on the following Saturday.

## CHAPTER VI

### DAYS OF LONG AGO

It was Saturday evening in early October, and a drizzly autumn rain was falling. Mamma Cameron was still busy with Nora, completing preparations for the Sabbath-day meals; papa had returned to the office on some important business matter; and the trio of Cameron juveniles had settled in the library to make the most of a rainy evening, when the door opened and grandmother appeared in the doorway, her arms full of skeins of crimson wool.

"I am looking for someone to help me wind up my little ball of yarn," she announced. "And as this is Saturday night and no lessons, and the weather man has put a ban on going out, I am wondering what we can do to kill time till bedtime."

The children scoffed gayly at this. Since grandmother's coming they had had no difficulty in making time pass quickly. There was a hurried scramble between Jessica and Harry as to who should install gramsie in the most comfortable chair in the cosiest corner. Then Jessica brought a hassock to her side, and, settling upon it, held up her arms for the wool, while Harry sprawled on



the rug in front of the fireplace, a picture of childish content, and watched the bright ball as it grew larger and larger in his grandmother's hands.

Donald was at the library table, busily engaged with his drawing. He was very much interested in architecture, and spent much time on his favorite hobby.

Ten minutes later the needles were clicking merrily on the beginning of an afghan for the library couch, while from time to time Mrs. Keith gave Jessica directions for the shaping of a tam-o-shanter she was making for Harry.

"Tell me a dreat long tory, dranma," begged Harry, bringing his small chair as closely as possible to grandmother's, and laying his cheek against her knee. "Bout when you was little, like me."

Don looked up from his drawing. "I second the motion, grandmother. You must have had many an odd or funny experience when you were a girl. Papa says times are so changed, even since he was a boy, that it is hard to imagine what they were like when you were young."

"Yes, do, gramsie," entreated Jessica. "It seems so strange that Don and I scarcely knew a thing about your life until you came here, and now it seems as if we had known you always."

"I am afraid pictures of my childhood days would look very dull to you children, with your many

sources of pleasure and amusement nowadays," replied Mrs. Keith, "but looking back on them I cannot think they were ever dull or monotonous, though they were entirely lacking in the pleasures which seem most to appeal to the youngsters of today.

"I had six brothers, all older than myself except one, and one sister three years older. We lived in a large house a half-mile from the little town of Lanark, in northern Illinois, on a farm of two hundred acres, a big farm for those days. A half-mile from our house, down a long hill and up a short one, lived Nell and Raymond Graham, and never did four children have 'gooder' times than we. We went to school together, and took turns spending the Saturday afternoons together. As Harry made the first request for a story, this one shall be for him, though you older ones may find it amusing. It is an experience we four chums had, just the summer before emigrating to Kansas.

"It was one Friday in early fall that the big threshing-machine, which traveled over the country and threshed for the farmers, finished threshing for my father. There were no steam threshers in those days, horse power serving the purpose."

"I saw one of those old-fashioned machines at a farm exhibit not long ago," commented Don. "I wonder the farmers in those days ever got anything done."

“Well, this machine threshed thirteen stacks of wheat and oats for my father in two days, that fall,” returned grandmother, “so you see it was good for something after all. We children were almost sick because the threshing was going on while we were at school, but we comforted ourselves with the thought that the strawstack was growing larger every hour, and Saturday was coming.

“I remember that Saturday as well as though it were yesterday. It was a perfect October day, and that immense strawstack seemed beckoning us all the forenoon, as we did our various tasks; for the children of those days had to help as long as there were odd jobs to be done, and they were certainly numerous on a big farm like ours.

“On this particular Saturday it was potatoes to pick up; and not long after sunrise brother Dannie, sister Ruth, and I were following an older brother with the horse and plow, as he turned over the potato hills. Dannie was too little to do much, but every little helped, and he was encouraged to do all he could. He was just a little bigger than you are now, Harry,” with a smile at the bright face against her knee.

“Afternoon came at last, but as we were rising from the dinner-table father put something of a damper on our plans.

“ ‘If you children go in the big barnyard to play

in the straw,' he said, 'you must keep your eyes open for old Sukey. She is very cross, and you must not go near her. I told Charlie to shut her into the small orchard this morning, but she gets out of it sometimes, and you must be on the lookout for her. If she gets after you, the thing to do is to run as fast as you can.'

"Old Sukey was the largest, crossest mother-pig we had ever owned, and we children were very much afraid of her. At this time she had a large family of little spotted porkers, barely old enough yet to follow her about; and, as she walked very slowly to guard them more closely, we felt certain we could keep out of her way.

"As soon as our playfellows arrived, away we hurried to the strawstack. Father had had a large harvest that year, and as he had had all the straw put into one long stack, twice the length of the big barn, we saw no limit to our prospects for fun.

"Jack, our shepherd dog, knew as well as we what was ahead, and came bounding to go with us. Remembering father's caution, we skirted around the fences first to locate Mrs. Sukey and her family. But we could not find any signs of her presence about the big straw pile, the long hog shed in the barnyard, or the small orchard father had spoken of; so, concluding she had taken her babies for a stroll in the west meadow this bright afternoon, we



climbed the fence where it joined the stack, and were soon chasing each other around on the top.

“You poor city children never had the pleasure of sliding down a freshly made strawstack, did you? It is certainly fun. Choosing the highest place, we put the dog in the midst, and, holding to him and to each other, away we went, pell-mell, over the side. Over and over again we climbed the fence and the stack, and scudded to the bottom again, until our sliding place became worn and we decided to choose a fresh one.

“‘Come on!’ cried Nell. ‘Let’s go over here where the machine stood last, and slide down into the chaff. It’s awful deep, and we can shut our eyes and make believe we are on a ship at sea, and are going down into the water.’

“We looked carefully around our change of base, as we recalled father’s warning, but saw nothing more alarming than an old Dominique rooster on the fence; so we surrounded the dog, and proceeded to carry out Nell’s suggestion. But we did not slide into the chaff but once, and we did not need to imagine the danger of drowning, with a much nearer and more real danger threatening us. Neither did we shut our eyes for long, for we all needed them very much at that time, to see which way to run to put the most possible room between us and the crossest pig-mother I ever saw!

“Mrs. Sukey seemed to have taken a fancy to be drowned, too; for she had burrowed into the pile of straw and chaff until she was entirely out of sight, babies and all! Plump down upon her and all her piggies we four children and the dog came in a body!

“For one moment it was a mass of screaming children, squealing pig-babies, and terrified grunts from the mother; and then we hastily gathered ourselves up and ran as we had probably never run before in our lives. Nell and Raymond reached the back door of the barn, which was in two parts, and, the upper half being open, they climbed quickly and safely over. But Mrs. Sukey was giving me a close chase, and, as I had Dannie by the hand and was dragging him along, I passed the barn and reached a gap in the picket fence which separated the barnyard from the chicken-yard. Pushing Dannie through so forcibly that he fell on his face in the dusty yard beyond, I burst off another picket and tried to follow, but by this time Mrs. Sukey had caught me firmly by my short skirts, and if Jack had not come to the rescue at that moment it might have been a serious affair for me.

“He jumped at the angry mother and nipped her savagely in the hind leg; and, as she turned furiously on him, I succeeded in following Dannie through the fence, Sukey being too fat to follow us. She at-

tacked Jack in real earnest; but at our call he gave up the battle, jumped lightly over the low fence, and we all retreated into the granary to collect our scattered senses. But you may guess we did not venture into the strawstack yard again until we knew Sukey was on the other side of the fence."

Harry's eyes were shining like two stars, as grandmother came to the end of this exciting tale. "That's the nicest tory I ever heard, dranma," he sighed, happily. "Was it a weally twuly?"

Grandmother looked puzzled.

Jessica laughed, and tumbling her brother from his small chair to the rug, rolled him over and over.

"That was a 'really truly' about grandma when she was a little girl," she assured him. "Now let's ask grandma to tell us a make-believe, Harry."

"Papa is always telling us how much nicer the games and amusements were for children when he was a boy than they are now," put in Don. "I think myself there might be lots of fun on a big farm. What did you do for amusement on rainy days, grandmother?"

"When I was a small girl," replied grandmother, "the favorite game of Ruth, Dannie, and myself was playing bear. To show you how simple were the old-time amusements, and to keep Harry's eyes open till mamma comes, I will tell you how we did

it. It was made up in our own fertile brains, and was a game we could not get mother's consent to play with our chums from Graham-Hill; so we usually played it on rainy afternoons.

"Our upstairs consisted of four rooms and a garret, the rooms not of modern build, but opening one into another. The stairs went up from the kitchen; and from the room farthest from the stairs a small door opened into the garret, which extended the whole length of the house, and was lighted only by a window at either end. On the high side, next the bed-rooms, a man could stand upright; but under the roof at the eaves, our five-year-old Dannie had to duck for fear of bumps. As the rear was only a storing place for bunches of dried herbs, old trunks and discarded furniture, we had little use for it anyway, and confined our operations to the roomy stretch between the two windows."

"I don't see why people don't have nice big garrets like that, nowadays," sighed Jessica. "A garret would be such a good place to go off by one's self to think."

"With dust and spiders, mice and bats for company," suggested Don. "I would prefer to do my thinking in more sanitary surroundings!"

"All in life that was mysterious and make-believe," continued grandmother, "centered for us children in the big garret. Here my older sister



labored for hours on the raiment of her doll family, even to the dressing up of several ears of 'calico corn' for an Indian family. I had a contempt for dolls, but here I pored over ancient histories and even my mother's funny old schoolbooks, and dreamed of the days when I, too, should write books, more fascinating than any I had ever read. And here Dannie, fed by the stories of Jack the Giant-killer, Aladdin, and Robinson Crusoe, built caves of the old furniture, and inhabited them with robber bands existing only in his own imagination. But about the bear game:

"Father had an old bearskin coat which the moths had spoiled; so mother gave it to us children to play make-believe in. Playing make-believe consisted of any frolic in which we represented witches, fairies, or anything or person save ourselves. By taking ample reefs in the sleeves, and discarding a portion of the skirts, we converted the coat into a bearskin that quite suited our taste; especially so after we had sewed back some 'tail,' to make a veritable tail some two feet long which would make even a nature-fakir smile. Arrayed in this fitting garb, Dannie, or one of us girls would retreat into the garret, leaving the low door slightly open, while the others scattered about on the floor of the great spare room a collection of acorns, spools, buttons, and what not, kept in the garret for this

purpose. These represented strawberries, blackberries, or any other spoils of the woods suited to the season.

"Then the berry-pickers would get to work, and a dialogue something like this would commence.

" 'Oh, Ruthie, whatever is that big, black hole over there?' I would say, indicating the partly open garret door.

" 'Aw, that's just the end of a big, black log papa chopped down yesterday.'

" 'But look! it's got another big, black hole right by it. That looks like it might be a bear's den!'

" 'You're crazy, Dot. It can't be a bear's den, 'cause there ain't no more bears in this country—papa says so. Ain't these fine blackberries? We'll soon have our baskets full.'

"An ominous growl now comes from the direction of the hole, and then another.

" 'Oh, Ruthie, did you hear that noise?'

" 'Yes, but it was nothin' but a chipmunk, or a blue jay.'

" 'But, Ruthie, it sounded to me just like it might be a bear.'

" 'You're a great big 'fraid-cat, Dot' ('fraid-cat' was the worst name we children ever called each other), 'and I'm never going to bring you berrying again. That's nothin' but a—' Here a little hand, wrapped more or less in the end of a great bearskin

sleeve, comes in sight at the opening of the garret door, accompanied by more and fiercer growls.

“ ‘Oh, Ruthie, do you see that thing stickin’ out of that big, black hole? It looks like a bear’s paw, a big, black bear’s paw!’

“ ‘Aw, it’s just a squir’l or somethin’.’ A hairy head follows the paw from the garret door, and it wags back and forth in imitation of a bear on a foraging expedition.

“ ‘Oh, Ruthie, lets run! It is a bear, a dreadful bear!’ and, leaving our spoils behind us, one of us scuds for the curtained alcove by the chimney, and the other for refuge under the four-poster bed, while the bear goes growling about the room, overturning the buckets of berries, and making bear-havoc generally. Unlike the bears in real life, this one seems to have the power of speech; for as he waddles about the room under his mountain of bear-skin, he talks to himself something like this: ‘What nice blackberries! But seems to me I smell little girls! I’d rather have a fat little girl to eat than blackberries. I’ll find one for my dinner.’ He proceeds to investigate our hiding places, either falling boldly upon the one behind the curtain, or dragging the other, with her assistance, from under the bed.”

“Was it a weally twuly bear, dranma?” asked a quivering voice, and Mrs. Keith, whose eyes had

been following her busy fingers, glanced at the troubled, upturned face at her knee, and answered comfortingly and laughingly, "Of course not, Harry dear. Just grandma and her brother and sister playing bear. Didn't Jessica tell you this story was to be a make-believe?"

"The real battle is on, now," continued the story-teller, "and we lunge and wallow about the soft carpet, the one who was not found by the terrible bear, coming to the help of the bear's victim, until we have had enough for the time. Then the berry-pickers flee below stairs to pour out some such tale as: 'Oh, mother, we were picking blackberries in the timber, when a great, big bear came out of a hole in a log and caught Ruthie, and we had to fight just awful to get away from him! And the bear got all our blackberries, and we are so hungry and tired, and, please, mother, we want some bread and butter and sugar.' Then, presently, down the stairs, having shed his furry coat, comes a panting, puffing little boy, and he gasps: 'Mother, I been a big bear, and I 'most got a little girl for dinner; but she got away, and, please, I want some bread and butter with sugar on it!'

"Sometimes the noise of the conflict proclaimed itself too loudly down stairs, especially if father was in; and mother's voice would come up the stairway, saying gently, 'Children, aren't you pretty



noisy?’ and we would answer in chorus, ‘We’re only playing bear, mother!’ ”

“You seem to have played the game by a cut-and-dried formula,” laughed Don. “I wonder it did not get old.”

“It was not our only rainy day diversion, by any means. Another was catching mice and rats in the granary. This building had one large downstairs room, and two smaller ones upstairs. Father depended on us smaller children, with Jack, and the cat, to keep the mice from doing damage to the seeds and other supplies stored there, giving us a bounty of five cents a dozen on mice, and twice as much on all rats caught. Not a very liberal commission, you may think, but as we sometimes made a haul of two or three dozen mice in one afternoon, and all shared equally in the candy or whatever was bought with the prize-money, it was not a bad investment of labor, which was principally fun. In an old discarded seeder-box, we used to keep an assortment of rags, paper, grass, etc., to furnish a tempting home for father and mother mouse, and in another part of the granary we had a pile of millet or timothy straw, under which was more material for mouse homes, which were more or less occupied. I have often thought that if the small residents of the granary could foresee our coming, and understand our intentions, on one of these invasions, how

their mice- and rat-ships must have quaked in their gray skins, when we three children, with Jack and Nig, the black cat, entered the granary on a rainy afternoon!

“How exciting the chase became, when, as was often the case, two or three fat mice were stirred out at one time! Or when some cunning old-timer of a rat became our prey! We usually gave Jack a wide field with the rat, for once let him get his teeth well set in the back of a rat, it was not worth much for a rat any more! Sometimes we would find a nest of wee, pink baby mice. We often hesitated at delivering these up to Nig’s sharp teeth, they seemed so cunning and helpless, but Nig had no such scruples; and, as the bounty included any sized mouse, and as father often told us that baby mice soon grew large enough to ruin the seed corn, they were sacrificed also. What fun it was, when Nig and Jack, usually so amiable, tried to secure the same prize, and had a round of angry barks, and some savage snarls over possession! Or when Nig tried to hold two or three victims in his mouth at one time! If it is true that ‘every laugh is a nail from your coffin,’ we certainly pulled many a one from ours in the afternoons we spent catching mice and rats in our granary.”

“I wonder what Helen King would think of that for a rainy-day diversion,” laughed Jessica. “There

was a mouse in our schoolroom one day—Miss Dunn was sure some one had brought it in for a joke—and when it ran under Helen's desk she fainted!"

"Yes, and I understand that several other young ladies tried to mount the desks, or leave the room, while others screamed until they might have been heard in the street," observed Don. "Girls of to-day haven't much mental caliber. Tell us another, grandmother. It is not bedtime yet."

Grandmother glanced at the clock, then at Harry, who lay with wide eyes on the rug, his head on Jessica's lap.

Mrs. Cameron had come in before the last story was finished, "Papa will be in soon," she said. "We may as well make an evening of it until he comes." She coaxed Harry to her side on the couch, where the sandman soon claimed him.

"Tell us something about your chums," suggested Jessica. "Didn't you ever get fussy with each other?"

"Not very often. We used to have too good times together to spoil them by very serious quarrels. As I have told you, they lived half a mile from us on the next hill south, and half-way between the two homes was the Graham pasture on one side of the road, and ours on the other. As it was one of the daily chores of us children to take the cows back and forth, we four met twice daily, in cow-driving

time, on the bridge at the bottom of the hill. We were never in too much of a hurry on the bridge, to lay plans for future good times.

“It was here, one evening in May, we fixed up a plan for a good time which came near being no kind of a time at all! It was a custom in the Graham family to give Nell and Raymond each a party on their respective birthdays; and as the fifth of June, Nell’s anniversary, came near, she and her brother grew highly excited over the lack of preparations. The matter seemed to have slipped from their mother’s mind, and their hints and questions regarding the expected frolic were smiled over and passed by. A couple of days before the date, however, Nell wrung from her mother the admission that it had been decided not to have a party this year, but to remember her birthday in another way which was still a secret.

“This plan of celebration did not suit Miss Nell, and, of course, did not appeal to the rest of our quartette. So we held an indignation meeting on the bridge next morning, and, forgetting that I was to assist in cleaning the garret that day, and that Dannie had a garden-bed to free from its first weeds, we sat on the bridge, and swung our feet, and consulted and planned, until a series of calls from two directions reminded us that even in vacations there were chores for little folks. Our scheme was well



hatched, though, and in response to Nell's entreaties we proceeded to carry it into effect in our garret that very afternoon.

"Cutting some note paper into small squares, we penciled this invitation on each of them: 'Miss Nell Graham presents her compliments to her friends, and wishes them all to come to her house to a surprise party on next Friday afternoon. This is secret. Don't tell nobody. At two-thirty.'

"Folding these three-corner fashion to make envelopes unnecessary, we managed to get all of them to their destinations before the appointed day; for Miss Nellié felt the importance of her dozen years, and decided to have a birthday party of her own arranging.

"'Mother won't care, afterward,' she said, loftily. 'Maybe she'll be glad I could go ahead and do it all myself.'

"I remember Raymond asking her what they would do for something to eat, and can yet see Nell's look of scorn as she told her younger brother, 'Oh, I guess mother always has something in the house, Raymond Graham, and if there isn't enough to go around, she'll get up something more!'

"Mother gave her consent at once that we might attend Nell's birthday party, never dreaming that any underhanded plans were being carried out. She gave us, as usual, a small amount of money to

buy some simple gift for her, and Dannie and I promptly invested the amount in all the peanuts it would buy, laying them carefully away until needed. It was Nell's intention to have the visitors appear without notifying her mother, as though she had had nothing to do with their coming; but before the eventful afternoon arrived Mamma Graham was 'wise,' as we say nowadays, to the whole affair.

"As the hour drew near for their guests to arrive, the children did not dare to put on their best clothes, but their efforts to present a good appearance did not escape their mother's eye. Before the first visitor made an appearance, she slipped quietly away, leaving a note on the dining-room table to the effect that she had gone away for the afternoon, and would not be back till late supper-time! There was nobody left on the place but Grandmother Graham, who was a delicate old lady, and so deaf that it was next to impossible for anyone to talk with her, and Ezra, the hired man, who seemed to be just 'choring around.' We learned afterward that he had been commissioned by Mother Graham to watch the visitors, and see that nothing happened to them or the place.

"The appointed hour brought the entire number of guests, with several others who had taken advantage of the fact that the invitations were to 'friends' to come too. As Nell saw the success of

her plan, she was in high spirits; and she ushered her company into the house only to find that the moving spirit of her previous celebrations had gone to parts unknown. She soon found, too, that grandma and the hired man had developed a sudden fussiness about the house which amounted almost to rudeness!

“Under the fire of their pointed remarks we soon retired to the big barn, where the first casualty of the afternoon was soon recorded. It happened to the smallest town boy, who fell from a crossbeam in the haymow, in a vain attempt to ‘skin the cat’ as Raymond Graham did. The fall to the soft hay could not have hurt him, had not some one left a hay fork lying with its tines upward, and the falling boy struck his arm against a tine, making a slight wound, which, however, bled freely. Ezra and Grandma Graham bound up the stabbed arm, but its uneasy owner followed us about the rest of the afternoon, whining to his older sister to be taken home. All this put something of a damper on the spirits of the rest.

“Next on the program Elizabeth Lee climbed to the top of the large tank filled with water for the cattle, and balancing her body across its top to see her fair face and graceful curls in its surface, lost her balance and tumbled in. When she was fished out by the watchful Ezra, she was half-drowned,

and wholly wrecked as to crisp muslin and curls! She was obliged to stand on the sunny side of the barn for nearly an hour, that a sun bath might repair the damage done by the watery one; and her appearance when dried out did not tend to repair the state of her feelings!

“We played ‘drop the handkerchief,’ and ‘happy is the miller,’ on the front lawn until we were tired; then widened our plan of amusement to a game of ‘hide and seek,’ all over the place, being excluded, however, from the house, by Grandmother Graham, and from the barn, where the horses were, by Ezra. This game soon lost its novelty, and the guests began to hint, and then to ask openly, for that most important part of a children’s party, something to eat. In desperation Nell brought out the peanuts which Dannie and I had contributed for the menu, but Raymond and two other boys forcibly appropriated these, and disappeared with the sack behind the barn. This did not help largely to quiet the dissatisfaction.

“‘Where’s your mother, Nell?’ asked one, a girl from Freeport, who had come with her cousin whom she was visiting. ‘When I have a party, my mamma stays at home and gets something to eat.’

“Nell was ready to cry, but I remember well how she resented this remark. ‘You just shut up, Flo Carver,’ she retorted. ‘This is a surprise party,



and we don't have to have lunch unless we want to. My mamma was called away. Besides, I don't remember that you was invited here, anyway, and if you're hungry you can go home and get something to eat!

"Leaving the guests to amuse themselves for a time, Nell and I finally slipped into the house to see if we could not find something which might pass for a spread. The pantry door was locked; and the little window, usually kept open for ventilation, afforded an excellent view of the Sunday cake and other dainties that might have been offered to her guests. But the window was fastened inside with a strong hook!

"I can see her now as she said in a tone of deep disgust, 'I never knew mamma to lock the pantry before. She must have been afraid of Ez getting into it for a lunch.' There was positively 'nothing doing' in the matter of refreshments, and Nell returned to the restless company outdoors and tried to divert them by proposing to go back to the barn and play in the hay. To this Ezra gave a grudging assent, he attending as chaperon.

"The sun sank lower, and the tired children, becoming more and more dissatisfied with their entertainment, or, rather, the lack of it, began to reproach poor Nell for her lack of hospitality. The largest town boy, one Tommy Jones, attempted to

browbeat Raymond into bringing him some apples from the cellar, which he had seen through the open grating; and, when rebuked by Nell, called her some rude names. Raymond resented this by slapping his guest smartly over the head with a cornstalk he had brought from the barn. A pitched battle followed, in which Tommy received the worst of the encounter from the country lad, who, sitting firmly astride him, cuffed him first on one ear, then on the other, punctuating each blow with some such remark as, 'I'll show you how to come out here and call my sister names,'—cuff, cuff—'and tease like a baby for something to eat before supper-time'—cuff, cuff. 'And now I'm going to let you up, you big coward, and I want you to take your big mouth and go right home with it, before I have to get our hired man to put you off the place!'—a last rousing cuff. 'There he comes now,' added Raymond, as Ezra, hearing the screams of the bully, and the excited voices of the other children, came toward the house.

"As it was really getting late, and mother had told Dannie and me to be sure to have the cows at home before sundown, we assisted our somewhat distracted hostess by persuading the company that it was time to go home. We told them that if they would come with us we would show them a robin's nest in the tree by the bridge, 'that had young robins

in it.' I have laughed many times since on recalling the anger and disgust of the small mob when Dannie and I, after we had climbed the pasture fence and had put a safe distance between ourselves and the rest of the party, pointed to the very top of the willow tree. There hung only the ragged remains of an old bird's nest, which had not seen young robins since the summer before! It was the 'last feather' for the tired surprise-party goers. Dannie and I were accused of being in the secret of the horrid surprise party—as indeed we were—and they paid their parting respects to us in a warm bombardment of clods and stones from the roadside, as we went to the back of the pasture for the cows.

"Reaching home, Dannie and I were surprised to find Mrs. Graham curled up with mother in our cosy parlor, busy with some fancy sewing. She took her departure as soon as we came in, asking us, however, if we had had a good time. To this, Dannie having left it to me to reply, I said, 'I guess so,' and left her to draw her own conclusions.

"It was long before we heard the last of that surprise party. We later learned, through mother, that Mamma and Papa Graham had made arrangements for Nell and Raymond to go with their father the following week on a trip to Chicago. There they had an aunt and uncle and any number of cousins, a visit to whom at that time would have

been a treat beyond the wildest dreams. After their father had heard Ezra's report of the trials of the young host and hostess on that unfortunate afternoon, he felt that they had been sufficiently punished, and pleaded that they still be allowed to go. But Mrs. Graham sternly refused her permission, though she was usually a most indulgent mother; and they were obliged to see him go alone on the following Monday morning, leaving them to the sorrowful thought that they had spoiled a mighty good time for themselves. As for Dannie and me, when our part in the surprise became known, we were punished by not being allowed to go to visit our chums until the end of the month. And, as Mrs. Graham did not allow them to come to us, our only chance of meeting was at the foot of the hill at milking time, and at Sunday school. It was as well, perhaps, for we were all so sore and disgusted over the outcome of the 'surprise party' that I doubt if we would have treated each other decently, if we had met oftener."

Don had long since pushed aside his drawing book, and given himself up to the enjoyment of grandmother's story, indulging in a spasmodic laugh occasionally.

"That was sure some surprise party!" he commented, as the story-teller folded up her knitting. "Something doing all the time! Say, grandmother,



why don't you put a lot of that stuff in a book, and have it published? It would make mighty good reading, wouldn't it, sis?"

"Maybe she will, some day," laughed Jessica, significantly. "Here comes papa," as a step was heard in the hall.

"This is certainly a wild night!" declared Mr. Cameron, entering the cosy library, and hastening nearer the fire. "I am glad my flock is so comfortably housed. By the way," glancing around the room, "isn't the flock keeping rather late hours?"

"Grandmother has been spinning yarns about the days of long ago, papa," said Jessica, "until we have forgotten the flight of time."

"Did she charm Father Time into forgetting to fly?" asked her father, glancing at the clock which pointed to a few minutes past nine. "I have twenty minutes after eleven," looking at his watch. *The clock had stopped!*

## CHAPTER VII

### THE "JOY-RIDE"

"PAPA," said Donald, as the family rose from luncheon one day the following week, "our high school has a joint debate with the one at Niles Junction tonight. Some of the teachers and a number of the students are going over and I told Claude that with your permission I would take the car and take him and Margie and Jessica. It is only ten miles over there, and the moon will be full."

Mr. Cameron reflected a moment, then shook his head doubtfully. "I would much rather you would not, Don," he replied, glancing at his wife.

Jessica intercepted the look. "Mamma said we had her permission, if you didn't object," she interjected eagerly. "It won't be late, papa. The debate will be over by ten o'clock, and we will come right home afterward. Don is so careful with the car that I feel as safe with him as I do with you."

"I think I may safely be trusted with the car," added her brother. "I have run it a good many miles without anything happening to it."

"It is not a question of your ability to manage

the car, laddie," answered his father. "It is that I do not approve of these late night excursions for you school children. It must certainly unfit you for your next day's work."

"But nearly everyone else is going," urged the boy, with slightly rising color. With Donald, to ask was usually to receive, as his requests were few and reasonable. "I think we might be allowed to go once in a while. This is our school work, and the teachers wish as many students to go as possible."

"Do you have a part in the debate?"

"Only as I have volunteered my services as a rooter! Please let us go, papa. I'll be ever so careful with the car."

"I cannot, Don. I don't care for the car part—I would trust you anywhere with it—but I cannot feel that it is best for you, and certainly not for Jessica."

"But I told Claude I was sure we could go. I'd hate awfully to go back and tell him now that we cannot. It will look so queer."

"I am sorry, Don. You should not make definite arrangements until you know. How are the others going? He and Marjorie might go with some of them."

"Most of them on the trolley. Mr. Sheldon said they could not go on the trolley, nor with anyone but me in a motor. Please say yes, this time, papa."

"I would rather you did not go, my son. I could

not think of allowing you and Jessica to use the street cars at night without suitable escort, and 'joy-rides' have been far too numerous with our young people this past summer."

Mr. Cameron spoke with decision, and Donald knew there was no further appeal from his verdict.

"Very well, sir," he said, with an outward show of respect, turning toward the door. "I will tell Claude that he will have to make other arrangements. Are you ready, Jessica?" and he passed from the room in the wake of his sister without another word.

Mr. Cameron stood in the window and watched the two as they walked together down the avenue. The lad's head was a trifle higher than usual, and his sister's disappointment manifested itself in an occasional impatient kick at the pebbles which lay in her path. He sighed deeply, as he turned from the window and prepared to return to the office, and two pairs of eyes met his sympathetically.

"That was hard, dear, wasn't it?" said his wife, gently.

"It is hard for fathers, and I suppose for mothers, too, to combat the evil tendencies of the age in which we live," he answered. "I cannot help wishing, sometimes, we had the children out on some remote Kansas ranch, somewhere."

"I need a capable manager for mine," suggested his foster-mother, half in jest, half in earnest.



"Just such a one as you would make, Dick. We will take them 'far from the madding crowd' tomorrow, if you say the word."

Mr. Cameron's answering smile at this sally was rather faint. "My responsibilities as a parent seem almost greater than I can carry, at times," he sighed. "If the laddie just doesn't lose confidence in my judgment for a few years yet!"

"Donald will see it your way some day, if he does not now," assured Mrs. Keith, confidently, as her son, with a troubled face, departed officeward. A few short hours showed the correctness of her prophecy.

It was mid-afternoon, when Mr. Cameron, answering a telephone call, heard his mother's voice: "*The Merchant of Venice* is to be presented at the Orpheum tonight, with John Drew in the rôle of Shylock," she announced. "I have secured a box which was given up at a late hour, and I would be pleased to entertain the Cameron tribe in it. May we not have an early motor ride, and then take in the play? This will lessen the children's disappointment, somewhat, and perhaps help you to forget, for a time, those heavy responsibilities you spoke of today. Margaret is much pleased with my plan, so I hope it will meet your approval also."

"You are always ready with the right thing at the right time, mother," he responded, in a tone of evident relief. "That's a fine program all 'round."

There was a slight tension at the Cameron dinner-table that night, Jessica still slightly sullen, and her brother frostily reserved. But grandmother's announcement of the pleasure in store for the evening quickly dispersed the clouds, and sent Jessica off into a flutter of excitement as to what she would wear on such an important occasion as her first real theater party.

"My cream-colored mulle will be prettiest," she decided. "It has short sleeves and a Dutch neck, and the trimming is really handsome. Mamma will never let Miss Yount cut my evening dresses low like the other girls'. She says I am too young," and recalling her other troubles of the day, she sighed, as though the parental decree were something hard to be borne at times.

She was standing before her mirror, putting the last touches to the dainty, girlish toilette, when grandmother, who had arranged her hair and otherwise superintended her dressing, slipped from the room and in a moment returned. "Allow me to administer the finishing touch, and complete the beauty of the Dutch neck," she said, lightly, as she fastened about Jessica's plump throat a string of handsome gold beads.

"I intended giving these to you when I came, Jessica," she said, "but the settings were old-fashioned and much worn, so with mother's advice I had them

restrung at the jeweler's. They are a real heirloom, for they were the property of my Scotch grandmother, years and years ago."

Jessica's eyes danced with delight as she noted the beauty of the yellow globes on their glittering chain. She had all a fair young girl's pleasure in beautiful adornment, and she turned and flung her arms around Mrs. Keith's neck, somewhat to the detriment of that lady's own dainty frills. "Oh, gramsie!" she cried, "you are always doing such sweet things for me, and this is the loveliest surprise of all! Is it—are they really mine?"

"All yours," smiled the giver. "There is quite a history attached to them. About a year before your mother's eighteenth birthday, at which time I intended giving them to her, a pet crow we had hid them in a hole under the garret window. There they lay for fifteen years, until we tore the old house down and found his nest."

"How did he get them?"

"He stole them from an uncovered jewel box on my dressing-table. We suspected he must be the thief, as nothing else seemed to be missing at the time, but we did not find his hiding-place until many years after."

"How funny!" exclaimed Jessica. "Does mamma want me to wear them tonight?"

"She made the suggestion," returned grand-

mother. "This is quite a proper occasion, I think."

"May I show them to Don?" and without waiting for further permission than Mrs. Keith's answering nod, she danced down the stairs to the library, where Donald, having completed his dressing, was poring over the play he was about to see performed.

He took in her appearance with quick approval. Don was secretly both fond and proud of his pretty sister. "Gee! but we are some dolled up, aren't we?" he commented. "Those yellow marbles are sure some hummers, sis. Who did you borrow 'em of?"

Jessica turned up her nose indignantly, and lightly cuffed his ear. "I don't wear borrowed finery, thank you. These are mine, if you please, a family heirloom handed down from several generations back. Even Helen King, who is always showing off her jewelry, has nothing finer than these."

"They're sure the hot stuff!" agreed her brother, and Jessica fluttered away to find her mother.

The whole family, including the faithful Nora, then went out for a pleasant spin over the beautiful driveways of the city, through the soft, autumn twilight; and later Don and Jessica sat with grandmother and their parents in the spacious theater, witnessing the masterly portrayal of the great English dramatist's most wonderful production,



presented by a cast of exceptionally fine actors. Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* had long been a favorite book of Don's, and Mrs. Keith had given Jessica a simple outline of the play as they whirled along in the motor. She further explained the cast of characters to the children before the curtain rose on the first act. Leaving the young people to the enjoyment of their first night of Shakespearean drama, let us follow the fortunes of Claude and Marjorie Sheldon in their first "joy-ride."

They had secretly consented, after Don's report of his inability to attend, to go to the Niles debate with Frank and Helen King in the Kings' motor car. With the excuse that she had left her motor coat at Helen's the Sunday previous, and that they would go around that way and get it, Marjorie and her brother left home early, and were soon speeding toward Niles in the luxurious motor. It was a beautiful evening. The glow of a full moon, mingling with the mellow autumn twilight, obscured the threatening appearance of a bank of dull, low-lying clouds showing faintly near the horizon line, and the spirits of the quartet flying along the level road leading westward out of the city rose with each mile covered.

They had not gone half the distance, however, when it became apparent that something was wrong either with the helmsman or the machine, which

veered oftener and oftener from the road as they sped through the small hamlets scattered along the way.

"Wonder what in thunder's the matter with this old car, anyway!" muttered the driver, at length, in an uncertain tone of voice. "Gettin' so sociable it wants to stop at every shanty on the road. Here, Margie," for the boys had exchanged sisters when they started out, "spose'n you sit over here and drive her a while. I'll hold you in, see?" and he made an awkward attempt to rise.

"Here, cut out that monkey-business, King," said Claude hastily, who, from his seat by Helen in the tonneau, had been watching their chauffeur uneasily for some time. "What's the matter with you, anyway? It looks to me as if you have all you can do to manage the car, without paying attention to anything else."

The young man at the wheel applied the brake until the car came nearly to a standstill, then turned toward Claude. "You go chase yerself, Sheldon," he said, thickly. "Marg and I are runnin' this whizzer, ain't we, ducky?" And he put his arm lightly about his companion's waist, and attempted to kiss her as the car glided slowly along.

Under other circumstances Marjorie might have made light of his demonstrations, but now she seemed to feel that they were decidedly out of place before

her brother and Helen, so she gave him a vigorous push, and replied pettishly, "Oh, shut up, Frank, and run the car yourself, if you know enough, or else let Claude do it!"

"Don't get fussy with your honey-boy," persisted the too-attentive pilot. "I'd just like to give you a lesson in how to run a good car. But if you're going to be stingy with your favors, I'll call it all right anyway, and give you all a sample of what this machine can do."

He settled himself in the seat, threw open the lever with a jerk, and the speed of the car increased rapidly. Claude's suspicions of the last few minutes were swiftly becoming verified, and now he sprang over the seat to the wheel and soon brought the machine, which was fairly whizzing over the smooth road, to a sudden standstill.

"Get into the back seat with your sister, Frank," he demanded, "and see if you can't pull yourself together before I have to throw you out of the car!"

Helen suddenly burst into tears. "I know what's the matter with him," she sobbed. "He drank nearly a whole bottle of wine before we left home. He told the butler he was afraid he was going to have a chill, and wanted something to warm him up, and made James get it for him."

"Oh, Claude!" cried horrified Marjorie, "what shall we do?"

"Do?" echoed her brother, in deep disgust, "We are going right back home; that's what we are going to do!"

This decided verdict on Claude's part, together with the general alarm of the party, brought the gay Mr. King partly to his senses. "Not with this car, you don't!" he asserted. "I'm boss of this car yet. I'm all right now. Must have taken a swallow too much, and it went to my head," he added, sullenly, exchanging seats, however, with Claude.

" 'When the wine is in the wit is out,' " muttered Claude to himself, as he started the motor. "Don't fret, Margie," he said to his sister, who was almost on the verge of hysterics, "We'll get this outfit to Niles, and then you and I will go home on the trolley."

But Marjorie immediately tabooed any such course of action. "I wouldn't leave Helen alone with him for anything in the world!" she declared. "I don't see how you can propose such a dreadful thing, Claude!"

Helen emphasized Marjorie's decision by declaring tearfully, that if they deserted her poor brother before he was "all right," she would never forgive them as long as they lived; and, as they were nearing their destination, Claude kept on the way and said no more. They soon drew up at the garage in Niles where they intended leaving the car for safe-keeping, and Frank stood stupidly by while Claude assisted



the girls to alight, and disposed their wraps safely away in the car, while they gathered up their slightly scattered senses!

Once on the street, however, and moving in the direction of the hall where the debate was to take place, Master King once more became unruly. "Who wants to go to any stupid, one-horse school debate?" he inquired, loudly. "Let's cut her out, and go to this movie just across the street. They always put up a rattling good show there."

After a hasty conference with Helen, who dreaded the appearance of her brother among his Cleveland acquaintances in his present condition, Claude wrung from him a promise to return home with them as soon as the first performance was over, and they all crossed the street to the picture show.

It proved to be a not overvivid presentation of Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, and possessed but slight interest for young Mr. King, whose present mental state seemed to call for some more exciting form of entertainment. His rattling fire of silly comments on the screen drama, and his too-persistent attentions to two young girls who sat in front of him, soon drew the manager's attention. The latter at first requested, and then insisted that he leave the building; and, fearing more serious complications, the rest of the party persuaded him to go outside with them.

They walked the streets for some time, under pretence of finding some of the other parties from home. Claude was now really alarmed by Frank's condition, and feared that he would be unable to control both him and the motor during the homeward journey. But as the cool night air and the exercise helped to wear away the effect of the wine on his addled mind, Frank began to realize something of the shame of his conduct, and insisted on leaving for home at once. They readily accepted the suggestion, and sought the garage where they had left the car. Here the first act of the young owner was to slip into an inner room under pretence of paying the storage charges, and there accept a drink from an attendant, of something far more dangerous for him than the wine on his father's sideboard!

Claude, half guessing his intention, hastily followed him in time to knock the bottle from his hand before he had secured more than a small portion of its contents. Sternly giving him a piece of his mind, Claude hurried him to the car, where he insisted on taking possession of the wheel; and, as he seemed inclined to be quarrelsome, Claude disposed the girls in the rear seat, and, placing himself by the driver, ordered him to "get for home."

Frank started out with the car evidently under good control, and the trio was beginning to breathe

more easily, when their chauffeur, who was rapidly yielding to the control of the stronger liquor to which he was not accustomed, remarked that he "would just show these Niles guys a turn or two in fancy driving by a Cleveland expert." Letting out the machine, he proceeded to cover the ground of the principal streets at a speed that soon had the eyes of some of the citizens following his dizzy flight, and attracted the notice of the authorities. At the risk of his life Claude once more displaced the reckless chauffeur and took command of the car, stopping it just as an indignant city official reached its side, and arrested its driver "in the name of the law" for exceeding the speed limit.

Claude met the officer's ultimatum with earnest though most polite protest. "The machine was out of the driver's control for a few minutes," he explained, "but I can manage it perfectly well, and we are leaving town at once. We live in Cleveland."

The officer grinned. "I judged as much," he returned, grimly. "Just cut that out, young sport," he now commanded, gruffly, as Frank, more completely under the influence of the liquor he had taken, poured out a volley of defiant threats. "I seen," said he, "that it wasn't you that was doin' the speed act; but this guy that was drivin' a few minutes ago is plain drunk and can't bluff me any. Sorry for the ladies [Helen was weeping silently], but I've had

particular instructions to herd this speeding business, and run in everybody that violates the rules. So you'll have to come with me, my giddy friend, and explain to my boss why you can't spend an hour or two in Niles, without puttin' people's lives in danger."

In the most courteous language Claude apologized for his companion's fast driving and abusive language, admitting, with much reluctance before Helen, the cause of his recklessness, but adding that the liquor had been given him at the Niles garage. The two girls pleaded with the man of the law to let them go quietly home under Claude's protection, and the united arguments might have prevailed had not Frank been prompted by the demon of the liquor he had taken to say, just as the others had hopes of being allowed to depart, "You'd better get your paw off'n that wheel, old man, and let us whirl out of here, or I'll put a crack in your cocoanut," at the same time displaying a small revolver.

Thoroughly incensed now, at this open defiance of law and himself, the officer promptly insisted on the entire party accompanying him to the police station. As a curious crowd was beginning to collect and Frank was becoming more disorderly each moment, Claude took charge of the two girls and followed the officer and his turbulent victim of the law, to the little building which did duty as a



station house. Here the police sergeant in charge, after hearing Claude's story, pitied his evident strait, and gave him permission to take the two girls to a hotel near by, until the offender's case should be disposed of. Here the girls sat for two hours, subjected to the curious scrutiny of transients in the small parlor, while Claude, at Helen's pitiful entreaty, returned to the station-house to champion, as best he might, the cause of her erring brother who had brought this calamity upon them. It was past midnight before the majesty of the law was satisfied by Claude's payment of a heavy fine with a check drawn against his father's bank account, and signed by himself, which the judge finally agreed to accept—he would have none of Frank's—and the young offender, now thoroughly sober, was allowed to leave the station-house.

It was a very subdued "Cleveland sport," as he had styled himself earlier in the evening, who took the place Claude curtly assigned him by his sister in the rear of the car, and was whirled away toward home. None of the party seemed inclined to speech, and the "joy-ride" proceeded for some time in silence, broken only by the soft purring of the motor.

If the truth were known, each member of the party was taking a mental review of the events of the evening, and the result of their reflections was

decidedly depressing. But their troubles were not over, and worse was yet to come!

The moon had disappeared, her golden glory swallowed up in a mass of ragged clouds, through which the lightning played at intervals. With a firm hand on the wheel and a watchful eye on the road which stretched like a ribbon before him, brilliantly lit now by the soft glow of the motor lights, Claude sent the trusty car through the night as rapidly as he dared; but they had covered scarcely half the distance between Niles and home when a belated equinoctial gale burst upon them in all its fury.

They had failed to note the rapidly freshening breeze, or give due heed to the sullen roll of thunder which would have warned more seasoned night-motorists of the nearness of the storm. Having made no preparation for such misfortune to come upon them out of the peaceful autumn night, they were completely drenched before they could protect themselves from the fury of the storm by the hastily arranged motor curtains!

Not daring to trust the still dazed owner of the car to manage it for even the short distance between the two homes, Claude drew up at the King's garage, where he turned the car over to the sleepy chauffeur who slept in the garage. Then, wrapping his own coat around his shivering sister, he bade Helen a brief "good-night," and set out for home with Mar-

jorie, ignoring Frank's mumbled apologies for the evening's disasters. As Father and Mother King were absent from home and the house servants asleep, the young people admitted themselves by means of Frank's latch key, and were thankful to appropriate to themselves warmth and rest, without being compelled to answer annoying questions.

But Mrs. Sheldon, awake and alert since the beginning of the storm, met her children at the door, and was too alarmed over Marjorie's soaked condition to more than ask them hurriedly what had kept them out so late. Claude's face was strained and white, and, like a wise mother, she accepted his statement that he was "all in," and would tell her everything in the morning. The lad was rugged, and disclaimed the need of further attentions than dry clothing and a warm bed. As Marjorie, however, had been somewhat delicate from early childhood, Mrs. Sheldon did not rest until she had swathed her daughter's shivering form in warm flannels, given her a hot drink to ward off the danger which lay for her in such a severe exposure, and administered a mild sedative to allay her extreme nervousness. The immediate effect of the latter was to induce a restless, unrefreshing slumber and poor Marjorie seemed likely to pay the full price for her misdoing and deception!

## CHAPTER VIII

### SHADOWS

DONALD and Jessica had cause to approve their father's wise judgment many times in the course of the following week. They had scarcely arrived at school on the following morning when the story of the escapade which had ended so seriously for their favorite friends, Marjorie and Claude, reached their ears, and from one source and another they were soon in possession of all the sorry particulars. Exaggerated, as the first report of such affairs always is, its real seriousness was confirmed by the absence from school of all the parties concerned.

On her return home at the close of the half-session, Jessica went at once to her room; while Donald, somewhat disturbed, sought his mother. "Let me finish setting the table, mother," he said, queerly. "You had better go to Jessica. She's in her room."

Mrs. Cameron looked up quickly at the odd tone in the boy's voice. "Is she sick?" she queried, anxiously.

"It is nothing more than a mental upset, I guess," he answered, doubtfully. "But it seems to have hit



her pretty hard, and will probably require the attention of the family physician," meaning his mother, "to effect a cure."

"You speak in riddles, son. What has happened?"

"Well, mother, the plain truth is that Marjorie and Claude went to the Niles debate, or, rather, went to Niles with Frank and Helen King in the Kings' car last night, without telling their folks that we were not going. Frank got some liquor somewhere, and made a fool of himself generally. He was boisterous at a movie which the four went to, instead of going to the debate, and was afterward arrested for speeding; and it was pretty late before they got the matter straightened out. The names of the entire party leaked out, and some smart reporters that were down from here caught on, and even got a snapshot, in some way, of the four. This came out with the whole story in a Cleveland paper this morning. Helen is nearly crazy with the notoriety of it all, and Marjorie is sick in bed from the effects of the wetting she got. They were so late getting started home that they all got soaked."

"But I see nothing in all this to prostrate Jessica," returned his mother quietly. "Marjorie is not dangerously ill, is she?"

"Not that they know yet," stammered Don, "but, you see, Claude and Margie are pretty sore over our refusal to go after I had said I thought we

could. Of course that part of the deal was not my fault nor Jessica's; but if we had not been so sure we could go, they would not have had to misrepresent matters in order to get to go."

"As if it were best to do that in any case!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron. "Don't lay any of the blame for this unhappy affair at your door or Jessica's, son," she added, decidedly, as she turned toward the door. "I am more than thankful that you both accepted your father's decision, however unwillingly, and were safe and happy at home with us."

"I am not very sorry, myself," murmured Don, on his way to the kitchen, while his mother went up the stairs to seek Jessica, whom she found, a wilted heap on the bed, spent with conflicting emotions. At sight of her mother's kind face her grief broke forth afresh!

Mrs. Cameron tenderly gathered the tumbled head to her breast, and wisely allowed time for the sobs to subside. Her first words still further checked Jessica's emotion. "Don has told me what happened to the young people last night, Jessica," she said gently. "But I fail to see why my girlie should take someone else's misdoing so much to heart. Of course it is right to be sorry for them all, even poor Frank; but the four are only reaping the fruit of their own wrongdoing."

"Marjorie said it was all Don's fault and mine,"

sobbed Jessica. "She sent a note to me this morning, and said she did not want me for a chum any more. She said if we had gone, as Don promised, it would never have happened, and that she is disgraced forever. They even had her picture, and Helen's, in one of the morning papers!"

"That is nothing so dreadful that it will not be forgotten as soon as the next newspaper sensation comes along," consoled her mother. "Listen, Jessica, dear. If Claude and Margie had accepted their parents' verdict, as you and Don did yours, they would have nothing to regret this morning. The lesson is bitter, but it will be a good one for Margie, for she well knows that Frank's companionship is not desirable for her. You need not fear losing her friendship. If you could keep it only at the expense of obedience to truth and to your own parents, she would not be a friend worth having at the price. Don tells me that poor Claude had a hard time to make the best of a bad situation; so doubtless he, too, has learned a lesson."

Drawing the young girl closer, and kissing her tenderly, Mrs. Cameron concluded, "Put it out of your mind for the present, dear, and it will all come right in the end. You are in no way to blame for their 'disgrace,' as Marjorie calls it, and mamma wishes you to dry your eyes now, and come down to your luncheon."

"I won't cry any more, mamma, if you just won't make me come downstairs," pleaded Jessica. "I couldn't eat a bite, anyway, and I don't want to see anybody but you."

"Very well," conceded her mother. "Nora may bring you up something, and Don will call you in time to go back to school."

"What's this I hear about some of our high school people being taken up and fined in Niles last night, for being drunk and disorderly?" inquired Mr. Cameron, of nobody in particular, as he shook out his napkin.

All eyes were turned in Don's direction. He flushed slightly, but responded lightly, "It was none of the Cameron tribe, thank fortune. I guess somebody's dad has a vote of thanks coming, though I confess I didn't see it in that light at this identical hour yesterday."

Mr. Cameron looked very much pleased at Don's reply, though it lacked the information he sought. "What about it, laddie?" he persisted. "I heard it mentioned several times this morning, but could not get particulars, somehow."

Donald went into brief details, and his father's brow darkened. "That young King is going too fast a gait lately, and if he does not call a speedy halt, he will land himself behind the bars where not even his father's money and influence will help



him." This was severe comment for Mr. Cameron, as Don realized.

"That's what he's found out already, from the copper that ran him in last night for speeding," replied Don.

"Where is Jessica?" next inquired Mr. Cameron, noting, for the first time, the vacant seat at his side.

"She is pretty well worked up over this affair, and asked not to be required to come down," responded mamma. "Nora will take her up a little luncheon presently."

"Better send mother," suggested Jessica's father, with a mischievous glance in her direction. "She can pour oil on troubled waters faster than anyone I know, not excepting yourself."

So, presently, acting on her son's suggestion, grandmother slipped softly into Jessica's room with Nora's daintily filled tray. The spell of her presence partially lifted the burden of Jessica's fancied griefs, and twenty minutes later, subdued but fairly presentable, she joined her brother at the hall door, and departed schoolward.

The unfortunate occurrences of the previous evening were not discussed at the Cameron dinner-table that evening, all other topics being overshadowed by plans being laid by grandmother for a trip to the autumn woods the following Saturday

morning. Jessica took small part in the discussion, but her spirits unconsciously lightened; and she went to the evening practice of her music without demur.

Outside the music room Don was whistling cheerfully as he put the final touches to the lawn preparatory to putting the lawn-mower away for the winter. Harry, content as always with his big brother for a companion, was making heroic efforts to rake the dry grass as fast as Donald cut it. He gave up the effort in a short time, however, and he and Don engaged in a merry war with the armfuls of dry grass for ammunition.

Her lesson finished, Jessica leaned from the window to watch the mimic battle. "What are you going to do this evening, Don?" she asked, finally. "Anything special?"

"Going over to Claude's to work up our joint discussion for next Friday's debate," her brother replied.

Jessica's eyes widened. "Well, I must say you have your nerve!" she exclaimed. "Do you suppose he will care to see you?"

Donald grinned. "Don't know. Nothing like finding out. We can't both be on the same side of a debate without consulting each other, that's certain. He called me after school and told me it was my turn to 'come across,' so I'm going, and I'll run

the risk of finding the latchstring out. Don't you want to go along?"

"Not I," returned Jessica, decidedly, though somewhat sadly. "I haven't been invited yet to 'come across,' and from what I heard today it will probably be some time before I am."

"Just go anyway," suggested her brother. "Let on you haven't heard anything, and if Margie's been in bed all day she will be ready to be amused by your account of the play last night. She runs to theatricals, and would have enjoyed that play immensely. I don't suppose she could give you a very entertaining account of *her* trip," with a grin, "but it wouldn't hurt you to play Good Samaritan and cheer her up a little."

Jessica shook her head sorrowfully. "I can't, Don. I am sure you would not care to go either, if you had heard the message she sent me this morning. I shall not tell you what it was, but it nearly broke my heart!"

Harry was turning somersaults on the pile of half-dried grass, and Don strolled nearer the window and glanced within, before replying. Then he said, "Now, look here, sis, you girls are sillier than I take you to be, if you don't wipe this business right off the slate and forget all about it. Claude and I have had it all out—didn't take ten minutes, either—and he don't blame either of us a bit. Catch boys

holding a grudge, and making themselves miserable for weeks, over a little thing like that!"

"It is not a little thing," rejoined Jessica, spiritedly. "Such things often affect a person's whole life!"

"Well, your part and mine was a very small part of it, anyway, thanks to papa," persisted Don, "and it won't do a bit of good for you and Margie to go on an endless warpath over it. Mamma told me, since supper, that she cannot go out with us in the car next Saturday morning, but that she will come out on the carline after luncheon. So Margie and Claude might go with us as well as not, if you two girls bury your imaginary hatchet before that time."

Jessica secretly welcomed this opportunity of reconciliation with her chum, but she only replied demurely, "Perhaps with such an inducement as a trip to the country for chestnuts, with you for chauffeur, she might forget her fancied injuries. I am certain I have no grievance I could not overcome by Saturday. You might invite them, if you are going over tonight, and see what they say."

"I thought I would," answered Don, bluntly, "that is, if you didn't object."

"What did mamma think about it?"

"She suggested the plan, and grandmother seconded it; so neither one is likely to kick. Mamma is going over to see Margie tomorrow, if—"



"If what?" queried his sister, as Don suddenly stopped.

"If she has time," he finished. "I must be off now, but I will be back early, and let you know what they say about going."

Jessica went to grandmother's room. The evening lessons were daily growing easier and more pleasurable. Those for the next day having been carefully gone over, grandmother, who had declined to discuss Jessica's troubles at the noon hour, pointed to the low rocker with the invitation, "Now, let's talk things over," and Jessica gladly availed herself of the opportunity. Curling herself cosily at grandmother's side, she laid her brown head against an inviting knee, and as she talked played absently with the bright folds of the now nearly completed afghan.

"I don't see how I can help feeling badly about it, gramsie," she began, sadly. "It is the very first time Margie and I have had the least bit of hard feelings toward each other since she came to Cleveland; except once, and that wasn't much. And now she has sent me word that she doesn't want me for a chum any more. You see, such terrible things happened to her, and she feels that Don and I are partly to blame. Mamma says we are not in the least, for how could we go, when papa said we could not?"

"Mamma is quite right, dear," returned grand-

mother, taking the restless fingers in her own for a moment. "You will find that Marjorie will view the matter in a more sensible light when she has gotten over the mortification of it all. Tell me about it."

"Why, don't you know?" queried astonished Jessica. "Didn't Don tell you all about it at luncheon?"

"Something of it, but I want to hear your side of the story."

"Well, you see, Frank had taken too much wine at supper, so he said afterward—for they have it at home all the time, and his folks were not there to limit him. They had gone to Columbus, so he took the car without their knowing about it. Claude and Margie went over to their house to start, so Mrs. Sheldon wouldn't know but that they'd gone with us. Frank acted silly all the way over, and said some dreadfully improper things to Margie, till Claude made him sit by Helen, and ran the car himself. When they got to the garage in Niles, Claude says that a man that knew Frank there gave him another drink, and it was whisky, and finished him for having any sense at all! He made up his mind right away that he wasn't going to any tame debate. As Claude thought they could get him away from town easier, and the folks from here wouldn't know what condition he was in, they agreed to go to a 'movie,' and then go home. He was so noisy and

impolite to some strange girls there that the manager threatened to have him arrested if he didn't leave, so they all went and got the car and started for home. Frank insisted on driving—I don't see whatever made Claude let him—and before they got out of town he was going so fast that a policeman took him up for speeding. Then, too," she added, in an awe-struck tone, "he had a revolver; and of course the cop wouldn't let him carry that around, and him drunk, too!

"So Claude had to leave the girls at a hotel, and go with Frank to police headquarters, and it was a long time before they could get the right persons to fix up his fine so he wouldn't have to go to jail. And all that time, gramsie, poor Helen and Margie had to sit there in the hotel parlor in their evening dresses. Everybody walked in and out and looked at them as though they were the ones that had been 'drunk and disorderly,' as they said about Frank. Claude couldn't get anyone Frank knew at home to arrange for his fine over the 'phone; so he finally gave his own father's check for it, and the judge took it, after Claude had signed it, and let them go. The policeman that arrested Frank said that it was getting too common for young swells from Cleveland to run out there in their cars evenings, and 'paint Niles red,' and it had to be stopped; and the only way to stop it was to arrest everybody who

violated the city laws. It seems awful hard, gramsie, that two nice girls should be exposed to such insults and rudeness, just because a young man ran his car a little too fast, or was noisy at a ten-cent show!"

Mrs. Keith was silent for a moment. Then she answered, "You remember the sorrowful fate of 'Old Dog Tray,' Jessica. Nothing was proved against him, or even charged, except the one fact that he was in bad company; yet he was punished with the others. Instead of sympathizing so deeply with these unfortunate young people, I hope you will come to see the matter as Donald does, and try to persuade them to avoid such mistakes in future. Take grandmother's advice, girlie, and forget this sad affair as soon as possible. At the same time, do your best to influence your chums to find saner and more enjoyable amusements. A bright, sensible lot of young folks, such as you have in your 'Avenue Gang,' as you call it, ought to be the nicest, happiest set in Cleveland. It seems to me that if all the rest do their part, one young fellow like Frank King couldn't find it so easy to go to the bad."

"He's been pretty wild for some time, Don says," said Jessica, gravely. "But we all overlooked his fast ways because he is Helen's brother, and she is so nice. Margie is awfully stuck on him though, gramsie," she added, with a sigh. "She thinks it is



cute of him to be just a little 'gay,' as she calls it, and she goes with him whenever she gets a chance."

"You don't mean to say that her father and mother allow her to go out alone with him?" laying down her knitting in surprise.

"Well, they don't do it exactly that way," explained Jessica. "You see the girls go out together to a picture show, or for a walk in a park. The boys are 'on,' and follow around, and they meet somewhere and maybe pair off, and each couple goes where it pleases for 'treats.' They have some place fixed up where they all meet later, and then go home together. Papa does not allow Don and me to go out with the bunch that way after night, but Margie has told me how they work it." After a moment, she added, as though her revelations had not been quite complete, "Two or three of the girls have their regular steadies, fellows, you know, who take them out once or twice a week, besides coming to see them Sunday nights."

Mrs. Keith's hands paused in their flitting among the bright-colored wools on her lap, and her sweet, kind eyes had a very serious look, as she said, "How much better it would be for them all, Jessica, if they would meet at each others' homes when they wish to be together, and amuse themselves with music, and games, and other home entertainment, such as would really fit them for first-class society

later. Such pleasures would leave no sting behind, as diversions like that of last night must certainly do. It would also make unnecessary the wholesale deception of their fathers and mothers, which happens when they meet their friends without their parents' knowledge or permission."

"Some of the mothers and fathers don't seem to care very much," commented Jessica. "Most of our crowd think papa and mamma are entirely too strict for the way everybody does nowadays. I am so glad, now, that papa did not let Don and me go to Niles last night, that I cannot tell it in words."

"Then I may infer that you have not yet told him so." Grandmother's remark sounded like an interrogation.

Jessica looked up quickly. "Do you think he would like—do you think I ought to, gramsie?" she asked, with a slight diffidence.

"I am sure it would give him a great deal of pleasure. Donald 'returned thanks' very bravely and manfully at the table today, and you would not hesitate to do the same, if you could have seen your papa's face when Don said he 'guessed somebody's dad had a vote of thanks coming for being so hard-hearted yesterday,' or words to that effect."

"That sounds exactly like Don," said Jessica, smiling. Then she fell thoughtfully silent, after a fashion of her own when deeply stirred, and Mrs.

Keith was not surprised when she slipped from the room a few minutes later, with a parting "I'll be back directly, gramsie."

Papa was reading the evening paper alone in the library, while he waited for mamma to return from a call on a sick neighbor. He was somewhat surprised when he felt a pair of soft arms steal around his neck with a tousle of fluffy brown hair in his eyes as a pair of lips sought his, and heard the voice of his one girl-treasure in his ears, saying shyly, "Papa, I have come to tell you that I am glad you did not let Don and me go to Niles last night, and I am sorry that I was pouty and fussy about it. I shall always believe that you know best after this."

Mr. Cameron drew the slight, girlish figure swiftly into his arms. "Jessica, my precious girlie," he answered, and his voice was not quite steady, "if papa can save you in the future from the many evils which beset the paths of sweet young girls like you, until you are safe in a home of your own, under a good man's care, I will cheerfully risk your being 'pouty and fussy' occasionally. What you have just told me more than makes up for your show of displeasure in being deprived of an outing which might have been a bitter memory to you also, in some way, as it will always be to Marjorie."

They had a long talk together after that, father and the little daughter who had never been so near

to each other in heart as they were tonight; and when mamma came in Jessica still lay closely folded in his fatherly arms. Her cheeks were flushed, there was a suspicious moisture in her bright eyes, but mamma's intuition told her that all was well.

Don returned a few minutes later, and gave an odd look at his sister, as she slipped from her father's embrace. "I thought you would be in bed, kid," he said.

"I was, almost," she answered, laughing. "I waited to see what you found out about the nutting party."

"They will both be delighted to go, if Margie is well enough by Saturday," he said shortly. Much pleased at the information, though slightly puzzled by her brother's manner, Jessica suddenly remembered her promise to grandmother to be "back directly," and she hurried away up stairs. Donald then gravely informed his father and mother that Margie was threatened with pneumonia, and that the doctor had enjoined absolute quiet, with no callers!

Mr. Cameron laid his arm lightly across his son's shoulders as he rose from his chair. "You were a thoughtful laddie to spare your sister that extra sheaf of bad news tonight, son," he said. "She has certainly had excitement enough for one day."

"So I thought," replied Don, soberly. "Margie



has been feverish and flighty all afternoon, and has often asked for Jessica; so Mrs. Sheldon may send for her to go over tomorrow."

"I hope it will prove to be nothing so serious," said his mother. "I will walk over with Jessica tomorrow evening, and Margie can see her if her mamma thinks best."

Papa's loving counsel was supplemented by a brief but very satisfactory mother-talk at Jessica's bedside, and she sank to sleep with her mother's hand closely clasped in her own. Don's report of Marjorie's willingness to make up had reestablished her serene content, and, as she had had no hint of her chum's danger, she went to Slumberland feeling that all was well.

Poor Marjorie's troubles, however, had not thus been wisely smoothed away by gentle counsellors. While Mr. Sheldon had the welfare of his children deeply at heart, he was inclined to be exceedingly stern in matters of discipline, when violations were brought to his notice. His wife, after hearing Claude's frank confession of their wrong-doing, and dreading the effects of her husband's displeasure on Marjorie's overwrought nerves, smoothed the matter over lightly to him the following morning. But later in the day, when Mr. Sheldon learned the real seriousness of the affair, he insisted on a complete history of the escapade from Claude. He was

very much displeased, though he praised Claude's handling of the difficult situation, and endorsed the giving of the check for Frank's fine. He "read the riot act," as Marjorie afterward told Jessica, to both Claude and herself, for their disobedience. His decision that until further notice neither of them was to be allowed to be out for the evening without his permission had a disastrous effect on Marjorie, aggravating the fever and nervousness which had followed the chill caused by exposure, until her symptoms were really alarming enough to justify the doctor's decree of rest and quiet.

At the end of three anxious days at the Sheldon home, however, during which only cheerful messages were sent to Jessica, the doctor's skill combined with Mrs. Sheldon's careful nursing had averted the threatened attack on the weak lungs, and on that evening Mrs. Cameron and Jessica walked over for a short visit. The sight of the flushed face and sorrowful eyes was almost more than tender-hearted Jessica could bear. All thought of resentment, or of the welcome she might fail to receive, fled from her mind, and she bent over her friend with kisses and tender words which were most comforting to the sick girl.

Jessica had been cautioned by her mother to avoid unpleasant or exciting topics. She therefore treated Marjorie's illness as a matter of slight dura-

tion, and entertained her with plans for the proposed nutting party, postponed for a week that she and Claude might accompany them.

Only once did Marjorie touch upon the unfortunate excursion which had cost her so much vexation of mind, body, and spirit, and that was as her friend was departing.

"Say, kid," she whispered weakly, as Jessica bent over her for a parting caress, "I am going to put that picture of Helen and me, that I cut out of the newspaper, up in my room where I can see it every time I am tempted to go 'on a bum,' as papa called our trip to Niles. Don't you think that is a fine idea?"

Jessica had nodded a smiling acquiescence, and had repeated Marjorie's resolution to her mother, as they walked slowly homeward.

"She did not seem to be vexed with me at all, mamma," she added.

"I told you she would experience a change of heart," answered her mother. "Her anger was only the natural outcome of her vexation with herself, at the result of her own wrongdoing; and time for reflection has shown her that she has no one to blame but herself!"

## CHAPTER IX

### THE HOME AMUSEMENT CLUB

SATURDAY found Marjorie convalescent, yet not sufficiently recovered to take part in the painting lesson, which Jessica generously postponed, and taking her fancy work spent the afternoon with her chum. All clouds had vanished between them, but as she noted what inroads the excitement and illness of the past week had made on Marjorie's physical condition, Jessica made a mental resolve to follow grandmother's advice, and do her best to turn her friend's attention to saner amusements.

"What do you say, Margie," she suggested, as she deftly turned the hem in a dresser scarf she was preparing to hemstitch for grandmother's Christmas, "to organizing a Home Amusement Club for this winter?"

"I infer from what papa said a few days ago that we will be obliged to do something of the kind, or go without amusement," sighed Marjorie, drearily. "But suppose we did? What would we do for amusement? Our old games are so childish and worn out!"



"Learn some new ones. And have an orchestra and glee club in connection. Grandmother will help us plan it and make it go; she said so. Have it every other week, or perhaps every Friday night."

"When would we ever get to go to a show, or a matinee, then? For I hope papa's stern decree will not be in force all winter."

"I am not going any more this winter," responded Jessica, "unless it is something very specially improving, like *The Merchant of Venice*, you know, and Grandma and Don go too. You cannot imagine how much better I feel since I do not go out nights, and how much easier my lessons are for me."

"You are looking frightfully well!" agreed Marjorie, with a half-envious glance at Jessica's clear pink-and-white complexion and bright eyes. "I thought perhaps you had been taking medicine—a tonic or something."

"I have been," laughed Jessica. "At first it was dreadfully distasteful, but now I would not miss my morning 'dose,' as gramsie calls it, for anything."

"What do you take?" queried Marjorie, quite interested. "Perhaps mamma would get me some like it. I need something on that order, for I feel dreadfully bum, and I don't eat enough to keep a mouse alive!"

"It is not medicine, at all," confessed Jessica, "but it is much easier to take. In the first place, I

get up earlier, and don't flunk my bath half the time, as I used to do. I warm it a little now, so I don't dread it any more. Grandmother thinks a cold bath in the morning is not good for growing girls. Then we both do breathing stunts with the window wide open, such simple ones, and just a few minutes—but they make you feel so good—and then I dress, and play with Harry, and go down stairs feeling like I could 'lick the earth,' if I had to. Papa says if my morning appetite keeps on increasing, my breakfasts will break him up! I do breathing exercises again at bedtime, and I actually measure two inches more around my chest than when I began."

"Well, I feel as though the whole earth had licked me overnight, when I come down stairs in the morning," sighed Marjorie. "But I hate calisthenics. The remedy is nearly as bad as the disease."

"Not after you get nicely started," protested Jessica, sagely. "After you get to feeling stronger, I will show you how we do it, if you would like me to. Grandmother says it is splendid for anyone with rather weak lungs."

Marjorie consented to "be shown," though not with much warmth, and produced a box of chocolate creams, Jessica's favorite confection. But her visitor lightly declined the proffered treat.

"I've cut those things out too, Madge," she made

excuse. "That is, between meals. Gramsie says it is bad for me to be stuffing my stomach with sweet things all the time, and she coaxed me to try going without for a whole week. I feel so much better since I quit that I am not going to begin again. We make homemade fudge and chocolate creams about twice a week, and eat them after dinner—gramsie is a dandy candy maker—so I don't miss it between times."

Marjorie helped herself liberally to the contents of the box before she replied, "Well, this is the first candy I have seen this week, thanks to a cranky doctor, so I am not going without any longer. Better have some. Once won't hurt."

Jessica shook her head smilingly, and turned the conversation back to the proposed club.

"Gramsie says—of course this club was her suggestion—that if we keep it simple once a week won't be too often to have it. She said we could take turns in entertaining, and that would bring it around to each one every ten weeks. Her idea was to have a program committee of three appointed every meeting-night, to act with the next hostess in arranging some short entertainment that would not require much preparation."

Mrs. Sheldon coming in at that moment, the subject of the Home Amusement Club was laid aside, to be taken up later in the afternoon; but

before either one was aware the afternoon had slipped away and the chiming of five by the clock startled Jessica.

"I promised gramsie I would be back by five, to go down town with her on some errands!" she exclaimed; and just then Mrs. Sheldon appeared, and announced that Don and his grandmother were waiting outside with the motor.

"I just can't bear to see you go," groaned Marjorie. "I don't see why you cannot stay and spend the evening. I shall be so lonesome! How shall I ever live through it?"

"Go to bed early and get lots of sleep," advised her friend. "That will do you good, and make the time pass quickly besides."

Their errands finished, the trio took a short drive on the lake shore, then stopped for Mr. Cameron before returning home; but Marjorie's sad face and sorrowful eyes still rose before Jessica's mental vision, and at length she appealed the case to grandmother.

"Margie has had such a hard week," she entreated. "Let's send Don over with the car for her and Claude. If she is wrapped up well it will not hurt her, and you could tell us some more stories, like you told us children one night. They are not exciting, and would do Margie lots of good. She has been crazy to hear you tell a story of your girl-



hood days, ever since I told her what a good storyteller you are."

As a result of this appeal, mamma called Mrs. Sheldon, and begged the privilege of sending the car to bring Claude and Margie to spend a quiet evening with their family, promising to send the invalid home early.

Two hours later found the "lonesomeness" banished, and Marjorie smiling and "comfy" as Jessica could make her in a big easy chair in the Cameron library, with Grandmother Keith near by, and the rest of the young people settled cosily around for a story-telling evening.

"Begin at the beginning, gramsie," begged Jessica, "and tell us about the fun you had when you were quite small."

"Very well," smiled their entertainer, "though I doubt if the simple amusements of my childhood days will prove very interesting to your visitors. If you begin to look bored, we will put on the muffler at once. 'The very beginning' would be an introduction to our playhouses, of which we had two, built into two immense willow trees at the foot of the orchard. One of my big brothers had cut out all the inside boughs to within about four feet from the ground, and had put in some stout flooring, making two good-sized rooms, where in the long summer days we children played at housekeeping.

Raymond Graham and I always posed as Mr. and Mrs. Graham, and Nell and brother Dannie, who occupied the other house, were, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson."

"I just love make-believes!" said Marjorie, contentedly, snuggling down in the big chair. "What did you do there?"

"Everything. Mother encouraged us to use the willow-tree playhouses; first, because the open air was good for us; and last, because much of our noise was thus kept away from the house and grandmother, who lived with us and was easily disturbed by children's noises. Here we rehearsed our declamations for Friday afternoons, and here in pleasant weather mother always let us set the lunch, which finished our day, when the Graham children, our only chums, were our guests. Here we took my sister's large family of homemade dolls through the measles, whooping-cough, and various other diseases which all children were supposed to be obliged to have at some time in their lives; and here we read our small stock of story-books over and over again, until we knew them, as we say, 'by heart.' "

"You must have had vivid imaginations," laughed Don. "Think of imagining a rag doll as having the measles!"

"Speaking of diseases," went on Mrs. Keith,

“reminds me of the time when Dannie and I had the mumps. There was no imagination about that.

“Some cousins of ours came to see us for a three-days visit and were taken sick while there. Mother at once pronounced their ailment the mumps, and Dannie and I were the first victims. The time was early spring; mother kept us from school, and also notified Mrs. Graham, that she might keep Nell and Raymond from the contagion.

“The message, sent by our hired man, reached her in the morning, after the children had gone to school; and as they had been sent a different way, on an errand, they had not stopped for us. Hearing at school that Dannie and I had something in the way of an extended parole from school, they came in that evening to secure a supply. Mother was not in the house at the time, so the two were curled up in the bedroom with us for a half hour or more before she came in and swiftly sent them homeward. There seemed plenty to go around, however, as they both came down in due time, with the painful, and in Ray’s case, dangerous disease, he being so sick that for a time his life was in danger.

“We did not find it difficult to find our own amusement when free from the numberless chores which the children of those days were expected to share. We did not consider it a hardship to hunt the eggs, after returning from school, and very few of old

Biddy's hiding places escaped our sharp eyes, whether she had chosen a hole in the remotest part of the immense strawstack, a snug corner under a feed box in the barn, or some almost inaccessible corner of the big haymow.

"We thought it great sport to tumble from one end to the other of the large cribs of corn, seeking the prettiest red, or calico ears, to dress up for dolls, as we gathered husks for the bed ticks which were often filled with this cheap material.

"Even the chore we disliked most of all, the sorting of the potatoes in the big bins down cellar in early spring, which always fell to the hands of us younger children, lost much of its unpleasantness; for after we were done we took the small, soft potatoes out to the big barnyard, and engaged in a battle royal, in which our big brothers did not disdain sometimes to take part. Armed with a goodly supply of slender but stout willow branches, we divided our forces into two groups at opposite sides of the long barnyard, each side with a bucket of potatoes for ammunition. We were required to wear our oldest clothes, and wash thoroughly in the woodshed afterward; but you children that have never had the fun of throwing soft potatoes from the end of a limber, willow switch, have missed one of the pleasures which made life endurable for youngsters before the days of basket ball, dancing parties, and



matinees. We were almost as expert as David with his sling; but the effect of a half-spoiled potato, even did it chance to strike a vital part, was not dangerous.

"Another of our pastimes was drowning gophers. You children have perhaps never seen a gopher, so I will tell you it is a small animal about the size of a large rat, and it lives in burrows in the ground.

"Gophers are very destructive to crops, taking the corn sometimes as fast as it is planted; every spring father put a liberal bounty on every gopher scalp which we might bring in."

"What with bounties on mice, rats, and gophers, you kids ought to have made plenty of spending money," laughed Don. "Did your father always pay promptly?"

"Always. Then mother allowed us two eggs out of every dozen; so, you see, it paid to hunt thoroughly.

"Our west pasture had always been a favorite home for gophers, perhaps because of the nearness of two large cornfields; and in corn-planting season we children put in many an hour in the 'gopher patch,' as brother George called the hillside where they burrowed. Mr. Ground Squirrel is very cunning, and seldom trusts himself in a hole in the ground that has not more than one outlet.

“Armed with long sticks, plenty of buckets, and perhaps a hoe or two, we would begin active operations on Mr. Gopher and his numerous family some warm spring morning, while our older brothers were planting corn in the near-by fields, and Mr. Squirrel was busy, too, getting his share of the yellow kernels.”

“What were the buckets for?” asked Jessica.

“To carry water for drowning purposes. This was the slowest, but most certain mode of capture. Leaving one member of the corps of gopher hunters on guard, the rest would bring water from the creek near by and pour into the burrow until it was flooded. If there were little ones, the tiny things would soon come to the top of the hole, gasping for breath, and were easily killed. But the grown ones were wary, and sometimes, when we had carried water until all our arms ached, we would see our intended victim scurrying across the pasture several rods away, having escaped through another entrance.

“Then there was but one thing to do—hide in the thicket near the creek and wait for another one to come from the field and slip into a convenient burrow; for not all the openings are inhabited. We have flooded a long runway many times until the water appeared at the second entrance, only to see, perhaps, the tiny inhabitant perched on a distant hillock, eating a grain of corn

and keeping a wary eye on us at the same time, as though he were rather enjoying the joke."

"Did you ever get 'panked, dranma?" asked Harry, unexpectedly, from his nest in the rug at grandmother's feet.

"I cannot remember so far back as the time when little folks are usually 'panked' for their naughtiness, Harry," she replied. "But as I was a very restless, mischievous little girl, I have no doubt I did get many a spanking. I remember well, however, the only whipping I ever received."

"You do not look as though you ever did anything naughty," said Jessica, lovingly. "Would it hurt you to tell us about it?"

"Hurt me? Not a bit! I have often wondered since, how I came to do such a silly thing. Going to the house from the hen house one day, I told mother that I had seen a hen carry an egg from a lower to an upper box, put it in the nest for a nest-egg, and lay another by the side of it; and in proof of my assertion I produced a warm egg from my apron."

The children's merriment at this impossible tale excited the curiosity of their elders in the adjoining room. Papa threw the connecting doors wider open, remarking, "I am afraid we are missing a chance to laugh. Is it funny enough to go around?"

Don lay back in his chair and fairly roared. "It

certainly is," he cried. "Grandmother has just unfolded a tale here that would make a nature-faker take a back seat. Whatever did you mean, grandmother?"

Mrs. Keith laughed too, before she replied: "I don't know what I did mean, Don, by spinning such a yarn, unless it was just a sudden overflow of my make-believe habit. I was the imaginative one of my family, and had amused my brothers and sister from babyhood by relating to them the most impossible tales, under the title of 'Make-Believes.' Grandmother Anderson thought this was a terrible thing for me to do, and usually scolded mother whenever any of my weird tales came to her notice.

" 'You're jest encouragin' that young one to lie, Eunice,' she would declare; but mother would reply that I did not expect anyone to believe my impossible tales, and that I was not given to telling untruths. But on this occasion I insisted that my hen story was the solemn truth, and had actually happened, until mother took up the matter with me.

" 'You don't really mean that Biddy carried an egg in her bill from one nest to another, Dorothy?' she said. 'You must not say such a thing as that.' But the more she protested the more firmly I stuck to the line of my narrative, until, finally, she sent me to the cherry tree in the back yard for a switch.



"I can still see the sad look on her kind face as she took the switch from my trembling hand and invited me to tell her just the truth about the hen; but I must have thought that a lie well stuck to is as good as the truth, for I repeated my story in every particular and clinched it by offering to show her the hen and the nest!

"The real truth of the matter was that I had indeed seen a hen fly from a lower to an upper box with her bill covered with the fragments of an egg she had just eaten, and that I had waited until she had laid a fresh egg in the upper box, which I had secured and brought to the house. After mother had talked seriously for several minutes about the dreadful sin of telling a lie, and had 'rubbed it in,' as we say, by the application of the cherry sprout to my bare legs, I became repentant, and gave her the plain facts, which she readily believed."

"Did you ever dress up?" inquired Marjorie. "That is the most fun ever, isn't it, Jessica?"

"We certainly did," responded Mrs. Keith, "and once, at least, when it was *not* 'the most fun ever.' This story, which must be the last one, is another instance of naughtiness, and was one of the sorriest 'make-believes' in which I ever took part.

"We had a maiden aunt, who came out from New York once to make us a visit. She was my father's oldest sister, and before her visit was ended we

children came to look on Aunt Priscilla as very like the ogress of some of our fairy tales.

“She was very tall and thin, with the regulation corkscrew curls, a piercing eye which seemed to see everything we did, and a habit of talking through her nose which my clever sister, Ruth, learned to imitate to perfection within a week. Her best dress was a shiny, rustling black silk, and whenever she went out she wore a pair of old-fashioned black lace mitts and a black straw bonnet, of an out-of-date pattern, with a well-worn ostrich plume dangling over one ear.

“Our merry noise, tolerated by our own folks, even grandmother, was very annoying to Aunt Priscilla, who would look at us reprovingly when we talked or giggled, and often remark that ‘when she was a child, she was taught to be seen and not heard; but that rule seemed to be out of fashion nowadays.’ It is not at all complimentary to me, but I am going to tell you of the ‘make-believe’ which brought her visit to a sudden end.

“Aunt Priscilla was in the habit of taking a nap every afternoon, and at such times it seemed to us children that mother scarcely allowed us to breathe lest we disturb her. This nap was usually taken in grandmother’s bedroom, on the north side of the house, as being farthest removed from the living-room and our racket. On this particular day Ruth,

Dannie, and I went to the garret, shortly after dinner, with a story-book father had bought for my ninth birthday. In our haste to read it we girls were taking turns reading it aloud, while Dannie curled up on the bearskin to listen.

“We had been quiet so long that mother probably thought we had gone to some of our outdoor haunts and, as grandmother had lain down herself, mother sent Aunt Priscilla to the big front room upstairs for her accustomed nap. Our garret door opened from this room, but we were so absorbed in our story that we did not hear her entrance, and as our voices did not reach the length of the roomy garret, she fell tranquilly to sleep, and, having finished our book, we concluded to play ‘make-up’ for a while.

“‘You be mamma,’ Ruth proposed to me, ‘and Dannie be you, and I’ll be Aunt Priscilla.’ The very thing! Diving into some old trunks, we quickly ferreted out a costume which I laugh yet to remember was a complete counterpart of Aunt Priscilla’s own, even to a pair of old, black lace mitts, which had been grandmother’s. The dress of rusty, black mohair, the black-silk bonnet with its long moth-eaten feather, the gray wig which had belonged to grandfather—and which was kept because nothing in our house was ever destroyed—were all dragged out and put on by my mischievous

sister, and we laughed softly, and giggled in whispers, until the make-up was completed. Then, secure in the thought that Aunt Priscilla was sleeping several rooms from our retreat, Dannie and I set our house at the farther end of the garret in order, for the coming of the gay little masquerader."

Marjorie's eyes were dancing.

"I think I see your finish with Aunt Priscilla," she exclaimed, "though I didn't know such things ever happened outside of story-books."

"This was a very serious 'really truly' for us," Mrs. Keith continued. "I cannot give you the conversation just as it occurred, of course, but I remember enough of the awfulness of it to give you the drift of our gabble. Feeling that it was necessary to have the entire family represented, we assigned the big cedar chest to be father, a little hair-trunk to be Ruth, a small rag doll dressed in kilts to be Dannie, who was impersonating me, and five ears of calico corn, in various costumes, to represent our five older brothers.

"Enter the imitation Aunt Priscilla:

"'How dew ye dew, brother William?' And we guessed afterward, that Ruth's high-pitched, nasal twang was our immediate undoing. 'I s'pose this is sister-in-law Eunice, though yew don't look quite so peart as when yew was first married.'

"'Take this easy chair, Priscilla,' I now say, in-



vingtly, and after a moment's sharp inspection of the offered chair for dust, Ruth sinks into it and goes on: 'It makes a woman look old to have such a big family as yew and William have got. I didn't reelly want to come way out here to Illynoise jest to see yew, not knowin' any of the children, but I felt if I ever saw brother William again I'd have to come. Men are so cold-blooded to their near relations, once they get away from 'em.

" 'Air these your three youngest? I can't say as they favor yew much, William, look more like Eunice—kind o' thin and washed out like.'

"She has been taking us all in with her sharp eyes, and taking off her bonnet and gloves as she talked, and now Dannie asks a question which it is safe to say we would neither of us have dared ask the real Aunt Priscilla.

" 'Are them real curls, Aunt Priscilla? Are you going to stay at our house long, and have you brought me and Dannie and Ruth anything?'

" 'Dear me, what an inquisitive child! But I don't suppose yew can help it, sister-in-law. Some children is so hard to teach manners.

" 'What a lot of big boys yew have got!' inspecting the row of corn-humans critically. 'It must be quite a chore to find feed and clothes for them all. I didn't know yew had so many.'

" 'This is our oldest boy, George,' I explain, 'and

he and his brother, Charles have just come back from the army.' I indicate two corn mannikins, in government blue. 'And these are Marvin, and Cyrus, and William junior. They are all a great help to their father on the farm.'

"'Yew seem to be pretty well fixed, brother William, for a man with such a large family. How big a farm have yew got?'

"I reply for the cedar chest, that I have over two hundred acres; but it is not enough for the boys, and I am thinking of moving to Kansas, where the boys will have a better chance to get land for themselves.

"'Mercy me! what dew yew want to go way out into that wilderness for? Sister-in-law, I'd like to go somewhere and wash my face, if yew don't care. I got so jolted and shook up on that dusty, noisy train, that I am mighty near worn out. I hain't had a wink of sleep sence I started; for when I went to get into one of them narrow beds, that cost so much for jest one night, there was a man sleepin' in the one next to me, with only some thin curtains between. I tried to get my money back, but I couldn't; so I jest set up all the way out here!'

"How much longer this interesting 'make-believe' would have gone on, it is hard to tell; for Dannie and I were being highly entertained by the many remarks of Aunt Priscilla which our wide-awake

sister had stored up, and seemed so able to reproduce at will. But a queer sound at the garret door startled us, and, to our horror, doubled up in the low doorway was Aunt Priscilla herself, peering at us with wrath in her very attitude.

“‘You good-for-nothing little imps!’ she cried, in a rage, ‘come out of there this very minnit! I’ll jest take yew down to your father, and tell him what yew been sayin’. Yer a set of impident young hus-sies, and ort to be thrashed.’

“In her anger she stopped for breath, and Ruth, forgetting her dress, and wishing to prevent father’s knowledge of our latest escapade, went bravely forward.

“‘We were only making believe, Aunt Priscilla,’ she said, very humbly. ‘If you will forgive us, and not tell father, we will never do it again.’

“She had gone so near the garret door, with her earnest apology, that Aunt Priscilla’s near-sighted eyes took in her make-up; and after that, she might as well have begged the little hair trunk for mercy; for, though irresistibly funny, her disguise was so true to life that Aunt Priscilla did not need to take two looks, as we say, to recognize herself.

“‘I’ll teach yew to make fun of your father’s only sister, that’s spanked him many and many a time,’ she raged. ‘I’ll pack up my things and go home this very day, if he don’t give every one of

yew a good lickin'. Yew haint had any bringin' up, and I'll tell yer mother so this very minnit!'

"She straightened up at the garret door, and flounced away downstairs in her wrath, and Ruth briskly took off her fatal disguise, while Dannie sat, a speechless, frightened heap, on the bearskin, and I sank into an old rocking-chair and laughed and cried by turns!

"After a while we crept to the stairway, where we could hear mother's sorrowful tones breaking in, occasionally, on Aunt Priscilla's angry ones, as that injured lady gave us children 'all that was coming to us,' as we say nowadays. Recalling the affair afterward, we knew that the only regret we had at the time was that we had troubled our mother's tender heart, that could never bear to give pain to anyone.

"Father had gone to Mount Carroll, some ten miles away, to sit on the jury, and we were truly thankful. Before his return Aunt Priscilla's anger had had time to subside, though she made the most of our childish frolic, and daily rehearsed to mother the insults she had received at the hands of her forward children.

"Mother had the habit of talking over with us at night the important happenings of the day; and it was a very subdued trio that awaited her coming that night. Sitting on a low chair between Dannie's



trundle-bed and the big four-poster where Ruth and I were cuddled, she went back to the days of father's childhood and told us of the time when he, with three brothers and one sister, had been deprived of father and mother both in the short space of three months; and how Aunt Priscilla, the oldest one of the family, with the help of an uncle who had a large family of his own, had kept the flock together until they could become self-sustaining. She told us that Aunt Priscilla had worked in the fields in the summer, and taught school in the cold, New England winters, until the last child had left the old homestead and gone out into the world well fitted by her stern but useful training for their own support.

"Though we were only children, we could see in mother's skilful handling of the story something of the hard life, and the sacrifices of this older sister, and mother's bedtime talk had the effect of making us heartily ashamed of ourselves.

"Two days later, and before father's return, Ruth and I bought a pretty silver thimble, in a sandalwood case, and presented it to Aunt Priscilla; and, much to our relief, she accepted it with the sole remark that she 's'posed children would be children!' She had intended staying until fall; but she left us the day after father returned, without telling him the reason for her change of mind."

"Didn't you wuv your Aunt Silla, dranma?" asked Harry, who, with the others, had been an absorbed listener to this tale of childish naughtiness.

Mrs. Keith looked lovingly down at the small questioner.

"We ought to have loved her a great deal, Harry, because she had been so good to our papa; but we would have found it much easier to love her if she had been kind and pleasant, instead of being always ready to find fault with us. We were a very thoughtless set of little folks in those days, and did not think of much but having our own good times."

Nora's entrance with a tray containing cups of hot chocolate, and a plate of thin, brown-bread sandwiches, brought mamma and papa Cameron from the adjoining room to share the irregular spread, and set the tongues of the small company to moving in a wave of merry conversation.

"I think, Jessica," remarked Marjorie, as she accepted the third sandwich, "that we are having the first meeting of the Home Amusement Club, which we started in our minds this afternoon. If we could be certain of as fine entertainment every meeting-night as we have had tonight, I am sure it would be a first-class success."

"You'll have to finish the details at some future time, Marge," put in Claude, looking at his watch and rising. "I promised mother to have you home

by ten, and if you linger much longer, I shall be guilty of breaking my promise, or Don will be obliged to exceed the speed limit."

"Don't let that happen, in any case," returned Marjorie, meaningly. "I am all ready, Claude, but I don't see where the evening has gone."

"Suppose we include the 'Avenue Gang' in our nutting-party next Saturday," suggested Mrs. Keith, "and finish the plans for the Home Amusement Club in a committee of the whole."

The idea met with instant approval, and a discussion of the proposed picnic became so prolonged that Claude took forcible possession of his sister at last, and conveyed her bodily to the waiting motor.

The two blocks between the two houses were swiftly covered, and after Marjorie had made her thanks and adieux to Donald she turned to her brother.

"This has sure been a perfect evening," she remarked, "and tied at each end to a 'joy-ride' as was a 'joy-ride.' I believe I will take Jessica's advice, brother mine, cut out 'sassiety frills' for the winter, and go in for the simple life."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," returned Claude, "at least until you can draw a long breath easily again. We'll have to get in on the ground-floor, then, as charter members of the Home Amusement Club."

## CHAPTER X

### THE HALLOWEEN PARTY

"THERE is nothing more enjoyable on a chilly autumn night than an open grate and a bright wood fire," remarked Mr. Cameron, as he toasted his feet on one side of the cheerful library blaze, while Jessica toasted her cheeks and a handful of chestnuts for Harry at the opposite side of the fender. "Are you getting in practice for Halloween, Jessica?" he added, noting her occupation.

She nodded a smiling acquiescence, as she raked out a couple of brown beauties, and Don looked up from a book of old Grecian architecture.

"A fellow will have to be on his job to have any fun this Halloween," he said, ruefully. "I understand they have doubled the police force for Friday night, and the city council has ruled that all minors must be off the streets by ten that night, unless accompanied by their parents. Would you mind chaperoning a bunch of us fellows around a while, Friday night, dad?" he asked, mischievously.

"I am afraid I must plead a prior engagement!" laughed his father.



"It is going to be hard lines for us," went on Donald, in an aggrieved voice. Some of the officers will be in plain clothes, and it will be hard to tell 'who is who.' We might as well not have any Halloween at all!"

"It could be spared from the calendar," responded his father, dryly. "The custom of observing it began, I believe, with harmless fireside diversions such as Jessica is just indulging in, and the working of various devices for the foretelling of one's matrimonial future. It would not have been a bad idea if it had ended there."

"But, papa," put in Jessica, "when everybody is expecting it, what harm is there in getting out and playing a few harmless tricks on people you know? Such as tossing corn against their windows, putting up tick-tacks, or ringing doorbells? We all know, when we go to the door on Halloween night, there will be nobody there."

"Unless what you take to be a false alarm of Halloweeners proves to be a real caller," remarked Mrs. Keith, "as was the case of the lady who had her doorbell rung repeatedly by the small boy in the next house, and who decided to give the offender a lesson. Stationing herself just inside the door, with a pitcher of ice-water, she opened the door suddenly, at the next ring, and with an energetic 'take that, you young imp!' she deluged a lady

friend, much to her own dismay and the detriment of a fine, visiting costume."

The children laughed in chorus.

"It is the failure to stop short of 'wilful and malicious mischief' that makes these strict regulations necessary," said Mrs. Cameron. "Sick people are often made worse by the noise of tin horns and popguns, property is sometimes injured beyond repair, and permission to ignore property rights for even one evening makes it easier to violate law afterward."

"It seems to me that youngsters like you and Don, Jessica," said grandmother, "could have a wonderfully good time under the shadow of your own 'vine and fig tree' on Halloween night. Do you never have Halloween home parties?"

"Sometimes," Jessica answered. "Helen King had a masquerade, last Halloween, and it was sure some swell affair! She had engraved invitations, five courses for supper, dancing with a hired orchestra, and favors for every dance. But it was a lot of trouble to get up our costumes, and—"

"And," interrupted Donald, "it was all so very swell and stylish that we didn't have as much fun, real fun, as if—"

"As if you had been out in some alley, tying a string across it to trip up some other Halloween nighthawk, or putting somebody's porchrocker on

the top of a telephone pole," finished Mr. Cameron, laughing.

"That's the size of it," agreed Don. "The trouble is," he added, sagely, "some of the boys don't know where to draw the line for what the cops call 'safe and sane amusement.' Before we left Helen's last year—and it was nearly morning—some of the boys proposed to abduct our high-school principal, and carry him so far out in the country that he could not get back for school next day. We were in masquerade dress, so he would not have known us."

"Did you carry out him and your plan successfully?" inquired grandmother.

"They didn't even attempt it. Several of the bunch were 'ferninst' it, and the ones that favored it were afraid the scheme would be given away. Mr. Bryant, the 'Prof,' is a jolly fellow, and might have taken it as a joke, but he is a hard worker, and not overly strong. Then, too, his wife had been sick, and a prank like that might have made her worse."

"Frank King was awfully fussy at Don for opposing the scheme," added Jessica. "Frank was to furnish the motor, and they were to take the 'Prof' out to the Country Club. The clubhouse isn't open after October first, but there is a caretaker who would have taken him in till morning,

when he could have sent for some one to take him home, or have walked the ten miles back."

"That would have been almost as good a joke as your class at the University played on your literature teacher one year, Dick," said Mrs. Keith. "Do you remember it?"

"Do tell us about it, grandmother," demanded Don and Jessica in the same breath, scenting a recital that would, perhaps, involve their father in a Halloween misdemeanor. Donald added, "I'll bet papa wasn't always as tame and proper at Halloween time as he would like us to be!"

"There were about twenty-five young people in the class," replied Mrs. Keith. "They let the professor's wife and the janitor into the secret, then got a drygoods box as large as would go through the door, and put it on the classroom platform. They addressed it in red paint to Professor Crane, and labeled it with this couplet:

'Within this box a treasure lies.  
Search, and appropriate the prize.'

They signed it, 'With the compliments of the literature class.' Then they crammed it to the limit with old papers."

"Aha, papa!" jeered Donald.

"You too, Brutus!" echoed papa, and grandmother concluded calmly, "But in the very bottom they



had put a set of fine reference books, which Professor Crane had wished for for some time, but had not felt he could afford. Papa can tell you what happened afterward better than I can."

"He did not seem to notice the box until the class work was completed," said Mr. Cameron, "and then he remarked that he had been invited to open the box on this *suspicious* or *auspicious* occasion, and he would therefore dig for buried treasure. After he had laid out the last book, he walked to the edge of the platform and declared, in his most dignified manner, that he could not overlook such an infraction of rules as that of which the class had been guilty, and that, under pain of possible expulsion, we were to report at his house at eight-thirty that evening, when a suitable punishment would be meted out to us. We certainly endured the punishment, which was an unlimited supply of hot biscuits and maple syrup, washed down by Mrs. 'Prof's' excellent coffee."

Don was quite disappointed at the sequel of the joke on the professor. "That sort of thing would be more appropriate for April first," he commented. "But I would like to go to an old-fashioned Halloween party such as grown-ups are always bragging about, just to see if there is anything in it."

"Don should have attended the one given by the young people staying at our house the first year

we were in Lawrence," remarked Mrs. Keith. "It was a particularly bright bunch of girls that arranged it, and it certainly contained a number of thrills; in fact, there was something doing all the time. Do you remember it, Dick?"

"I should say! That was the night the boys were 'barred out'; but we 'caught on,' and got into the game good and plenty. When the girls set their 'dumb supper,' they did not guess that Jim Graham was quietly reposing in a hammock that was slung closely up under the big, extension table; and his version of the excitement he created, when he appeared in ghostly array at the appointed moment and slipped into the vacant chair by Grace Merton, was very satisfactory to us boys outside. I have always believed, though, that he exaggerated the facts."

"From the way the girls pitched him out of doors when they discovered his identity, it was a wonder he lived to tell any tale at all!" laughed Mrs. Keith. "But Grace did really faint; and Maggie Dickerson came near doing the same thing when she walked down cellar backward, and was caught in Frank Howard's arms and kissed, at the foot of the stairs. When he helped her upstairs, it was hard to tell which was whiter of the two."

"I think some of those things were rather scary to do!" declared Jessica. "You would never catch

me going down cellar backward, even in the brightest daylight."

"That is because, like most girls nowadays, you are troubled with 'nerves,' instead of being provided with 'nerve,' " jested Don.

"But the best of all the fun that night," said Mrs. Cameron, "was the ghost that pursued Mabel Herron and me, when we went to the churchyard for the traditional hemp-sowing. The boys, unknown to us, had dressed Dr. McPherson's big dog in ghostly array. As Mabel was the doctor's niece, the dog followed her everywhere, and it was an easy matter to persuade him to play ghost, the more so as the boys had fastened a small piece of fresh beef to her dress skirt. He 'appeared' to us first at the corner of the church—one of the boys had been holding 'him in the vestibule—and, as we both thought it was a man on all fours, the sowing process was unduly hurried, and we retreated homeward in haste. Mabel fairly fell in at the door, and nothing in the world would have tempted either one of us to venture abroad again that night!"

"That was the night when Florence Everleigh went to the cabbage patch near the barn to bring in a cabbage root," said grandmother, "and your papa, Jessica, hiding behind a near-by haystack, just as she gathered her sample, rose up and gave

a groan that Flo declared could have been given by nothing human!"

Mr. Cameron laughed heartily. "I had almost forgotten about that!" he said. "I think she only took three steps to reach the kitchen door! My groans were feeble compared with her screams, which were heard in the house."

"She was scarcely more frightened than Lida Watson," supplemented Mrs. Cameron, "when she went to a dark closet with a lighted candle in her hand, to see her future husband's face in a mirror placed there for that purpose. One of the girls had secured a skull from a classroom, and I, hidden behind a long, dark cloak hanging in the closet, manipulated said skull for Lida's benefit. That closet held her only till she could get out of it, and I shall never forget how she slammed the door behind her!"

The children enjoyed these reminiscences of their elders very much, and the fact was noted by their grandmother.

"Madge," she said, as the two sat over the mending basket next morning after the children had departed for school, "why don't you let Jessica and Don give an old-fashioned Halloween party next Friday night? It would eliminate any desire they might have to be out skylarking around, and might prove enough of a novelty to help some of the



other avenue roustabouts curb their imps of mischief."

"Do you know, mother, I was just wishing we might do that," replied Mrs. Cameron. "You notice I said 'we,' I would never be equal to anything like that alone."

"I will lend you all the wits I have," returned her mother. "But you used to be head and front of such affairs in your girlhood days, Madge, and, with two bright kiddies to help out and act as a stimulus, you ought to be ready to meet any emergency of Halloween entertainment."

"It is so different now," sighed Mrs. Cameron. "The children's parties are on a scale almost as elaborate as their elders', and cost about as much. The expense would not be so much of an item, if it were not for the work of preparation, which is exhausting for one who keeps so little help as I. You heard Jessica's description of Helen King's party. Well, it is only a fair sample. You can see by Don's comments that it was not considered a success, by the boys at least, and that they would have preferred to be out on the streets playing practical jokes on some one."

Grandmother Keith had turned the matter over in her resourceful brain since the night before; and before the morning was over a general plan for the entertainment of the children's intimate friends was

completed. It was unfolded to Mr. Cameron, when he came in to luncheon, and met with hearty endorsement.

“Call on me for any help you may need, financial or otherwise, mother,” he said, as he left the house. “I always dread to see Madge jump into anything of this kind, for it invariably leaves her worn out. But with your help I am sure it will be plain sailing, and perhaps we can make up in this way to the youngsters for the loss of their ‘joy-ride.’ Will you try to keep it from them until the time arrives?”

“No, indeed!” responded his mother. “We shall allow them to help in every possible way. That will be half the pleasure for them. And you need not think we have large intentions on your purse, either. This is not to be that kind of party.”

Mr. Cameron smiled indulgently. “I will venture to assert that it will be a success, anyway, with you at the helm. So stage the performance in any setting you prefer, and I will help out in any rôle you may assign to me.”

It needed but a hint from grandmother, that evening, of the plans that were under consideration, to bring Jessica’s lessons to a prompt and satisfactory conclusion; and as soon as they were finished, she and Mrs. Keith went to the library, where Don was just finishing a written review of an epoch in

Roman history. Mamma joined them at once, and opened the subject by asking them if they would like to entertain the "Avenue Gang" with an old-fashioned Halloween party of grandmother's arranging. As Mrs. Keith had already been hostess for two or three informal evening gatherings of a few of their friends, the children were filled with enthusiasm at once, so, with her usual directness, she promptly invited them to the dining-room for the first step in the preparations.

Seating them at the table, she produced some English walnuts, which Donald was directed to cut carefully in halves, emptying the shells, Jessica sat by with pencil and paper, and made out a list of the guests to be invited, which was not to exceed fourteen. There was but little disagreement, the two being usually very amiable in the arrangement of their pleasures. Don made a slight demur when Kitty Leighton was mentioned, remarking that she was too aristocratic to enjoy anything but the very swellest of parties, and Jessica objected sharply to Frank King, for whom she had conceived a mild dislike since the night of the Niles debate. But Mrs. Keith settled both these questions with a word.

"A taste of simple amusements will not hurt Miss Kitty," she observed, quietly, "and you owe it to Helen not to slight her brother."

There was some little difficulty in finding enough

boys to offset the number of girls, but here again grandmother came to the rescue.

“You do not necessarily need an equal number of each,” she remarked. “Should it be desired to ‘pair off,’ we can tie a handkerchief around a girl’s arm, and let her play boy. It makes lots of fun. If she is a good actor, so much the better.”

When nutshells were emptied of their contents, the two wrote, on tiny squares of paper, the invitations, which read:

October 31 8.30 P. M. to 12 Come Donald and Jessica R. S. V. P.
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One of these was pressed into each empty shell, a loop of gay ribbon inserted between the halves, which were then firmly glued together, and a card attached containing the name of the invited guest.

Coloring them with water color, in every conceivable shade, in which process Harry was allowed to assist, concluded the evening’s labor. Jessica looked at them fondly, as they lay in a gay mass on the tin plate where they had been placed to dry.

“Aren’t they dear?” she whispered to Don, as they cleared away the litter they had made. He replied with a boyish nod and smile, “Grand-



mother's the dear. I'll bet you it will be a great lark, sis, just from the ridiculous way its starting out. Won't Helen open her eyes when she gets her invitation, and thinks of her last year's engraved ones?"

"Yes, and she may turn up her nose, too!" answered Jessica, laughing.

It was almost unbelievable how many of the things there were to do for the proposed entertainment the children found themselves able to do under grandmother's direction. The next night the 'shell-game,' as Donald called it, was played over again. Only this time, the two halves were painted a similar color, and in the bottom of each half was affixed a tiny wax taper, while on the outside was painted the initials of a guest. The use of these half-shells was a secret for the present, but in the pleasure and excitement of further preparation the youngsters had no time to consider folded mysteries.

There was a visit to the shops, for one evening, after a list had been prepared, and an inexpensive but choice gift was selected for each guest. The children cudgelled their brains to secure something appropriate; as, for instance, a unique little hand mirror for Kitty Leighton; a small but handsome medallion of Maude Adams, Marjorie's ideal actress, for that "stage-struck" young lady; and a paper-weight in the form of a horse for Fred Parker,

who loved horses and had a trained saddle-horse of his own.

These, and others equally suitable, were wrapped in a goodly quantity of papers of different colors and, after having an apt inscription affixed to each, were buried in an immense kettle of oats, representing a witches' caldron.

The evening lessons were not slighted. Jessica had learned that grandmother was long on discipline, so she threw her whole mind into her studies for the time, and put them out of the way in short order, that the arrangements for the novel party might not be interrupted.

Donald had been commissioned to convey the invitations; and he brought in the triumphant report that every one had been accepted. This led his father to remark, slyly, that he was afraid grandmother was getting her name up as an entertainer!

Promptly at eight-thirty the guests began to arrive, to be met at the door by a sheeted figure with gleaming eyes, and a clammy, outstretched hand, the touch of which brought a scream of horror from several girls, and exclamations of dismay from the boys. Grandmother had encircled Don's eyes with a wide rim of phosphorus, and, instead of his own warm hand, he gave to the guest's extended one a white kid glove, filled with cold, wet sand. After this chilly reception by the master of ceremonies,



PROMPTLY AT EIGHT-THIRTY THE GUESTS BEGAN TO ARRIVE

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each guest was passed to Jessica, who, in the garb of a veritable witch, with three cotton owls in her hair, a stuffed black cat on her arm, and a broomstick for a wand, ushered them to the dressing-rooms above. They were then marshalled through a dimly lit passage-way to the dining-room, which had undergone a wonderful transformation in the past twenty-four hours. Autumn leaves, tied with gorgeous crepe-paper ribbons, gleamed everywhere. Jack-o-lanterns showed their grinning faces from every shelf and the sideboard. Tree branches, garlanded with autumn berries, outlined the windows; cornstalks, with the ripe ears still hanging on them, were massed at either side of the fireplace; and long festoons of popcorn and apples hung from the window of the big bay. In the center of the room a great kettle, suspended from a tripod of rude poles, showed faintly through a mass of autumn greenery, and from the top of the tripod a trio of great, snowy owls, which one could hardly imagine as made of cotton-wadding, looked eerily down upon the assembled merry-makers.

The pictures had been removed from the walls, or covered with large sheets of drawing paper. These had been decorated with cats, owls, witches, and bats, in black crayon, the bats hanging by outstretched wings, on dead tree limbs. The surroundings were creepy enough to give any one "a fine set

of thrills," as Marjorie observed. As soon as all the guests were assembled Mrs. Keith lost no time in starting a series of merry games, first of which was the "cabbage game."

Each guest was led in turn to the darkened kitchen, and invited to draw a cabbage-stump from a basketful. This stump, when brought to the light for inspection, was supposed to reveal, by its formation, the characteristics of the person choosing it.

What shouts of laughter went up as Mamma Cameron, after gravely considering each stump, announced that the specimen betokened a hasty temper, a sour disposition, red hair, stinginess or liberality, a lean anatomy or the opposite, and so on!

The cabbage test completed, a horizontal bar was suspended from a chandelier, having a candlestick with a lighted candle affixed to one end, and an apple to the other. The bar was then set in motion, and a prize offered to the one who should secure a bite from the apple. Many were the efforts and failures, until Claude allowed the candle to give him a dab in the face, while he secured "a bite." For his success he was presented with a goose-egg, gayly hand-painted with a landscape in the Impressionist style!

The juggling of a wedding ring over a glass of water, while the alphabet was slowly repeated for

the initials of the future spouse; the paring of apples and throwing the long parings behind one, for the formation of mysterious initials—these, and many other time-honored Halloween observances were indulged in; but at length the party was ushered into the darkened parlor, and forbidden to speak, laugh, or move about, for five minutes.

While this novel rest amusement was taking place, changes were rapidly being made in the big dining-room. Eight small tables now surrounded the central tripod, and the girls were admitted and seated, one at each table. The room then being totally darkened, the boys were ushered in, and directed to find seats for themselves. There being a lack of boys, Marjorie had been deputed by Mrs. Keith to “play boy,” and, accordingly, she passed in with the laddies. As talking or laughing had been tabooed, there was much suppressed giggling, and moving about, to secure a desirable location. But all were seated at last, and the lights streamed out over their heads, disclosing at least one funny situation.

With her quick wit, and her scent for fun, Marjorie had established herself by Edith Courtland, one of the shyest members of the party. In the darkness she at once proceeded to get acquainted, by encircling Edith gently with her arm, and taking forcible possession of her hand. Edith failed to

recognize her partner, and, overcome with fright lest the lights be turned on, tried silently but strenuously to draw herself from these embarrassing attentions. The sudden illumination of the room showed Marjorie's arm still encircling her, and Marjorie's laughing face close to her own, though Edith was pushing her unwelcome companion with all her might.

The look of dismay on her face quickly changed to one of relief and amusement as she recognized her "spoony" friend. There was a gale of laughter at her expense, which put all at their ease, and the luncheon proceeded merrily. There were brown owls cemented to white ones—"owl-time sandwiches," Jessica named them—and Frank King shocked the guests by remarking that he "could lick the stuffing out of such birds all night!" There were tiny sugared doughnuts of grandmother's own making, tied in pairs with yellow love-knots. There were delicious frosted cookies cut in heart shapes, and funny, little pumpkin tarts which melted in one's mouth. There were old-fashioned mugs filled with sweet cider, and tall glasses of real, red lemonade. Lastly, there was a wonderful cake, with a letter and a figure frosted on the top of every piece, a cake which, Mrs. Cameron explained, contained a ring, a button, a coin, and a thimble.

"The letter on the top," she continued, "is the



initial of your first love; the figure, the number of years before you will find your mate. The ring indicates the first one of the company to be married; the coin, possession of great wealth; the button, a single life; and the thimble, a life of labor."

The cake was dispensed, each guest choosing with closed eyes, and many and varied were the exclamations when it was learned who were the recipients of Dame Fortune's favors.

Frank King had drawn the ring, and leaning over the table, openly offered it to his partner, with the accompaniment of his hand and heart.

"Frank evidently doesn't intend to lose any time," remarked Hazel Lee. "Everybody hush, while Fate, in the person of Miss Kitty Leighton, settles this important matter."

"Keep it to decorate some worthier hand, Frank," she replied, promptly, though she flushed rosy-red with embarrassment. "I would not like to make any rash promises at my tender age!" Everybody laughed, while Don remarked to Frank that that was once he got it in the neck!

"Unto him that hath shall be given," sighed Claude, somewhat irreverently. "Bert Courtland 'took the cake' as usual. He has the dime. That is the important part. Congratulations, Bert!"

"Margie, as I live, you drew the button!" exclaimed Helen. "Fancy you posing as an old maid!"

"Bachelor girl, if you please," corrected Marjorie. "Madame Fate is entirely correct in her forecast. I shall be wedded to my art, and live for it alone. Hazel, I see, has the thimble. We had arranged long ago to stray through life together, she to plan my costumes and keep me in order generally, while I sway the world with my art, and gather up 'dough' enough for both. So what would I want with a man?"

"That is certainly a stunning program, Margie," commented Grace Snow. "Where and when shall you make your debut?"

"Whatever will you do with that pug nose on the stage, Margie?" queried Bert. "And who ever saw a redheaded heroine?" (Marjorie's hair was inclined to be auburn.) So the merry jests went round, for Marjorie made no secret of her theatrical ambitions.

She laughed their jests to scorn. "If you're all from Missouri, I've got you to show, for all things must have a beginning, you know," she began, gayly, but Jessica instantly protested.

"We'll take up a collection on the spot, to buy your first box of grease paint, if you will 'cut it out,' " she groaned, and Marjorie subsided.

A little later the tables were cleared away and the gay company, with fast-locked hands, circled the witches' caldron, and waited in silence. In

the dim light cast by three sickly candles, three spectral figures, their faces closely disguised by hideous masks, stirred the supposed witches' broth, and muttered in wheezy tones:

“Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.”

After the couplet had been repeated three times, to the accompaniment of low-turned lights and an occasional cattish-sounding wail, each guest in turn was handed a gift, and requested to read the accompanying inscription aloud.

The guests decided afterward that only a most expert mind-reader could have distributed Fortune's favors so skilfully. The hand-mirror for Miss Kitty might have been an accident, had it not been for the accompanying inscription,

“Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us,  
To see oursels as ithers see us!”

The miniature hair brush for Mabel Underwood, whose curly locks were in a chronic state of tousle, bore the advice,

“Use me till your elbows ache,  
Use me till your back do break,  
For your friends' and beauty's sake!”

An assorted array of gorgeously dressed paper dolls fell to the lot of Hazel, who still indulged her child-

ish taste for dressing dolls. The last gift, which fell to Claude, the naturalist of the party, proved to be an artificial snake which, mounted on a spring, made a pass at his face as he opened the box in which it reposed.

Claude had his revenge a moment later, for when the circle disbanded to compare gifts and seek new fields of amusement, he caught the largest and most awkward of the attendant witches by her flowing hair, and the black cloth mask and ragged locks came off in his vandal fingers. Papa Cameron thus betrayed gave a shriek of dismay, and fled through the near-by library door, causing a shout of merriment from the delighted guests.

"The very idea of papa romping around in that kind of rig!" exclaimed Jessica, when she could get her breath for laughing. "I shall never be afraid of him again when he gets on his dignity, never!"

Lastly, a large dishpan of water was placed on the dining-room table and each guest was given the fairy boat, bearing his initial, which had been fashioned from the walnut shells. After the tiny tapers were lighted, the children silently dropped them into the water, and stood in a circle to watch them as they floated gracefully about.

As Mrs. Keith stirred the water occasionally, by a gentle shake of the pan, it was a pretty sight to see the dancing, gayly painted shells, moving hither and



thither, as though really seeking a mate. Hazel Lee's bark was first to go down, and Don's taper was last to go out; indicating the shortest and the longest span of years. Marjorie's bark floated side by side with Jessica's through every disturbance; and Frank King's and Kitty Leighton's touched and separated three times before going down, side by side and almost at the same time. The group watched and commented, until the last tiny taper expired.

"That's the prettiest Halloween trick I ever saw tried!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, who had shed his witch's costume, and returned to the room in time to see the fairy boats in their sailing ventures. "One could almost imagine the spirits of the owners were directing their movements."

The prolonged striking of the library clock roused the revellers to the recollection that their invitations had been limited to the hour of twelve, and they began reluctantly to make preparations for departure. Donald's "glad hand," gravely offered in farewell at the door, was declined by all; but as Jessica gayly waved her guests from the door with her witch's broom, both she and her brother were overwhelmed with a profusion of thanks for the pleasures of the evening.

"I believe they really and truly meant it too, gramsie," declared the weary dispenser of Hal-

loween festivities, as she sank for a moment on grandmother's hearth rug before seeking her own nest. "I watched them all, all the evening, and not one seemed bored or disgusted in the least. Don told me a few minutes ago that he had never enjoyed a party so much in his life as he had tonight, and I am sure I never had a better time. It doesn't take hired orchestras, and expensive caterers, and swell clothes, to have a good time after all, does it?"

"That was what mamma and I thought when we arranged it, Jessica dear," answered grandmother, smiling down fondly on the flushed face. "In these days of elaborate entertainment old people as well as young are apt to forget that simple pleasures are still the best and leave the most happiness behind."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BIRTHDAY "SHOWER"

"GRAMSIE," said Jessica a few evenings later, as she curled up in her low rocker in Mrs. Keith's bedroom for the chat which had come to be a common occurrence before retiring, "I have a very serious problem on my mind. May I tell you about it?"

"To be sure. Is it in compound fractions, or square root?"

"Neither," laughed Jessica. "You see, one week from Saturday is Kitty Leighton's fifteenth birthday; and as we have had a surprise for every girl in our club this year, we must have something for her. We have taken turns in planning each one, and it is up to me to suggest what shall be done for Kitty. I am so glad it comes on Saturday, and I would like to have a 'shower' for her, if it were not for my painting lesson."

"The painting lesson can have a morning hour for once, or it can be sidetracked altogether for such an important thing as a birthday," replied her listener. "What then?"

"You know how they do 'showers,' don't you, gramsie?" she went on, pulling out her brown braids to thread her small fingers through the shining strands of hair, and gazing thoughtfully into the glowing grate. "Everybody goes to her chum's house, and each one carries something she has made or bought, and something for refreshments too, and it's all a surprise.

"As we have had one for two of the others, I would like this one to be different, someway. I am glad this is the last birthday for this year among the girls," a little pucker of anxiety clouding the girlish face. "It has been quite a stunt to plan and carry out so many entertainments. Edith Courtland's and Hazel Lee's come with only a day between them; so we just combined theirs, by going to a matinee on the day between. We just couldn't be celebrating all the time. That was Marjorie's idea, and I think it was a good one. We made up a purse, and paid all their expenses, and treated them afterward to ice cream and chocolates. Then we took a ride to the end of the longest car-line, seven miles and back. We had lots of fun celebrating the double birthday, as we called it.

"Then we had a 'shower' for Mabel Underwood, who lives in that fine house three doors east of Margie's. She is so awfully rich that everything had to be just swell. Some of our mammas thought



we could not afford so much expense, so we got cross and fussy over it, and nobody enjoyed it at all. I did a lunch cloth for her, and I never got so tired of anything in all my life! Mamma had to help me to get it done in time, and she told me then that I would never be allowed to begin another thing like that, unless I was certain I could finish it."

"Did the 'put-off habit' get you?" queried grandmother, with an amused smile.

"Some," confessed Jessica. "Then, too, Harry was sick and it was so hot nobody wanted to work. Can you give me some new ideas, gramsie?"

Mrs. Keith reflected several minutes before answering her granddaughter, who still sat with her chin in her hand, gazing into the fire.

"I would be glad to assist you with any suggestions, if I could, Jessica," she said at last, but in a tone so unlike "gramsie's" that Jessica looked up quickly.

"Don't you believe in 'showers'?" she asked.

What grandmother did and did not believe in was coming to be more and more a matter of moment to Jessica, and she waited eagerly for the answer.

"Yes, and no, dear. If the gifts which compose the 'shower' are inexpensive trifles into which the loving remembrance of the giver has been wrought,

or if they are on the fun-making order, and if the luncheon is simple enough also to be easily managed, the 'shower' plan seems to me to be all right; but if it is more trouble and expense than the givers can well afford, then it is certainly not so good."

"Then we will plan one of the first kind," answered Jessica, gayly. "If you don't mind, gramsie, I will ask the girls over here for a few minutes after school tomorrow, and we will let you decide what we shall each give, and what the refreshments shall be. Then I am certain there will be no hard feelings."

"And if yours is a success," returned Mrs. Keith, "then I shall plan one which I shall ask you all to help me carry out."

Jessica looked inquiringly at her companion, but grandmother's eyes were bent, just then, on her swiftly flying fingers. Presently Jessica asked, "On whom? I don't know of any more birthdays in our set, very soon; not before Christmas, anyway. Or in the family either, only papa's, which comes next month; but I would laugh to see anybody work off a 'shower' on him! He would probably 'be obliged to be in Columbus that day, on business' for his firm! He would certainly make it a point to be anywhere except at the 'shower'!"

"I have no intentions on papa's peace of mind," laughed grandmother. "But the 'who' shall be my secret, if you please, until we see how Miss

Kitty's comes out. Is she quite a rich little girl? I have inferred as much."

"Her folks are not so wealthy as Mabel's," returned Jessica, "but Kitty has about everything she wants. I am beginning to wonder already what I could get for her, that she hasn't already. Won't you work your head for me, gramsie dear, before Monday night?"

Don paused at the open door just then, and caught the petition.

"Seems to me grandmother is requested to 'work her head' quite regularly, lately, for somebody I know. I just stepped up to inquire if there was any chance for me to get five minutes' help on this tenth theorem; but if you have a monopoly on grandmother's brains—"

"What makes you study so on Saturday night for?" interrupted his sister.

"For to keep my gray matter in circulation over Sunday, and incidentally for to improve my grammar!" replied Don, facetiously.

"We girls are going to get up a 'shower' on Kitty Leighton, for her birthday," went on Jessica, ignoring Don's thrust at her mode of expression. "I was only asking grandmother to give me an idea for my offering. But if you think her brains are in danger of collapse from the demands made on them, you might dig up the idea and let all her mental

effort be saved for the tenth theorem, whatever that may be."

"Delighted!" returned Don. "If I am not mistaken, Miss Leighton is the sweet young creature who comes to school looking as though she were arrayed for a fancy-dress ball. By all means give her a pot of cold cream, a box of rose paste, a powder puff, a set of crimping pins, an electric wrinkle-eradicator, and as many other articles of like utility as you think she will have leisure to manipulate, outside of the brief time she must give to brain improvement and beauty-sleep. Her expenses for cosmetics must be enormous."

"Shame on you, Don! When did you ever say anything as rude as that of one of my friends before?"

"I beg your pardon, my dear sister, also Miss Kitty's; but 'fac's is fac's,' and occasionally invite the attention of a candid world. But if my suggestion is so distasteful to you, permit me to change it to the extreme of simplicity, and suggest that her admiring friends each present Miss Kitty with a thimble, a needle, and a towel to hem. The spontaneity of the offering might inspire her to make an effort in the direction of usefulness—who knows?"

"I am afraid I will have to get the dictionary yet, to interpret your remarks," laughed Jessica.



"Thanks for your suggestions, however, and you may have grandmother for just twenty minutes."

"Have you a mortgage on her time, which you expect to foreclose at that time?" he inquired, with fine sarcasm.

Jessica evaded the question.

"I give you fair warning that I shall not excuse any more such slams on Kitty, for she is one of the nicest girls in our set, and one of the best liked, even if her dresses are a trifle loud. She can afford to wear fine clothes, but she is not a bit stuck-up. When little Norman Gray fell and cut his face open on a paving brick the other day, Kitty got her hands all dirty, and ruined a fine handkerchief wiping the dust and blood from his face. And she didn't seem to care a bit."

"Quite commendable!" commented Don. "Now, if she could only be induced to display the same judgment in matters of dress! She always impresses me as a sort of composite of the 'lily of the valley' and 'Solomon in all his glory.' "

"And if you are going to indulge in figures of speech," retorted Jessica, "she impresses me as a walking model of the text, 'Charity thinketh no evil!' I never heard Kitty Leighton say an unkind thing of anyone in my life!" and Jessica flounced into her own room, after this parting shot, almost vexed, for once, with her brother.

Promptly at the close of the Monday session of school the library at the Cameron home was invaded by a merry group of chattering girls. The entire club was present, except Miss Kitty and her special chum, Grace Snow, who had been deputized to take up her friend's attention for an hour or so, and who had persuaded Kitty to accompany her to the city library "for some notes."

Once plunged into the discussion of a "shower," the tongues wagged fast, every one having some suggestion to make; but at length Marjorie, who was president of the club, succeeded in securing silence.

"Mrs. Keith has a plan for us," she announced. "Now, everybody keep still and listen."

The girls laughingly obeyed their spokesman's decided orders, and Mrs. Keith suggested, "How would you like to give your friend a set of flower doilies which you had made yourselves? If you wish your gift to have an individual appearance, and yet not be too expensive, or take too much of your time at this busy season, work each one in a different pattern, and have each one done up in a different color of tissue or ribbon, and accompanied by each person's favorite flower, or an appropriate verse of greeting."

"I could not write a verse of poetry if my life depended on it," frowned matter-of-fact Jennie

White. "Mine would have to be labeled simply, 'Hello, Kitty!'"

"It would not necessarily have to be poetry," returned Mrs. Keith, "though an attempt at rhyme would probably be more amusing. I used to write jingles for my girl friends in college, occasionally, and perhaps could reinforce your ideas a little. Making up a couplet to accompany a flower would scarcely induce a brainstorm. By the way, Mrs. Cameron and I found a little shop down on Main street the other day, where an old lady makes and sells the loveliest crepe and tissue flowers I have ever seen. If you would find the hothouse product too expensive, why could you not make selections from her large stock in which to hide your gift? They would certainly furnish a gorgeous shower."

"That is a dandy idea!" declared Edith Courtland. "I move that we ask Mrs. Keith to make our purchases for us, and arrange the details, if it is not too much trouble for her; then we will work like Trojans to carry out her plans."

"I am glad it is to be something inexpensive, and not very much work," said Hazel, "for mother is so opposed to my putting so much time and money into these birthday affairs."

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Keith, "it would be well for Mrs. Cameron, who knows the best shops,

and myself, to look around and report before making purchases."

It was decided that this would be the better plan, and then Mrs. Keith added, "You young ladies know the saying that 'there is graft in everything that is going, nowadays.' If I attend to all these matters for you busy students, I am going to ask, in turn, that you will give me your aid later in a little matter that will not take much time or money. But it will give you all, if I am not very much mistaken, a great deal more pleasure than this 'shower' will. What do you say? Are you willing to take me on trust, to this extent?"

"We never miss a chance to have a good time," promptly returned Marjorie, for the circle. "What do you want us to do?"

Mrs. Keith refused to divulge any hint of her secret, at present, so the meeting was pronounced adjourned, and the girls walked home in twos and threes, their tongues still wagging.

"That's the sweetest woman I ever knew!" declared Marjorie, "and I can't tell why, either. She's not so handsome. But she just makes you feel comfortable, and sort of satisfied with everybody, and everything, as soon as you come where she is."

"She's got a lot of sensible, practical ideas," said Edith. "Jessica Cameron always was a sweet



girl, but I can't help seeing a great improvement in her since Mrs. Keith came. I wouldn't mind having her for a grandmother, myself."

"I wish we might make her an honorary member of the club while she stays," suggested Hazel. "I never did want any grown folks poking around in it before, but I think she would be lots of fun."

"I thought of that myself," agreed Marjorie, "when she offered to do all that looking around for us. Let's make her honorary president; and perhaps she will give us some practical suggestions that will help us to pull the old club out of the rut it's been in for more than a year. I am getting ashamed to belong to it. It doesn't amount to anything."

"Miss Vance is utterly disgusted with us, I am sure," giggled Helen King. "She never mentions the club to us any more at Sunday school."

"When were you ever there to hear it, if she did?" queried Edith, "Though I don't know as it is quite proper for me to ask such a question."

"It doesn't seem easy to keep up something of that kind, while we are going to school," interposed Marjorie. "We nearly all have a few home duties, most of us are trying to keep up our music, and—"

"And we do not intend to allow anything so frivolous as a charity club to distract our attention from the more essential matters of Saturday matinees,

a party as often as once a week, and other diversions too numerous to mention. Why don't you say it, Margie, and be done with it?"

"It seems to be being said for me," laughed Margie. "I endorse your sentiments, too. But I don't see what we can do. None of our acquaintances seem to be in need of charity," with a glance over the well-dressed group of girls. "Christmas is coming soon, however, and perhaps it will help to stir us out of our usual state of do-nothingness!"

"Margie has coined a new word," remarked Edith. "Will you have it put in the next dictionary, Margie?"

"It fits the bunch it referred to, anyway," conceded Hazel. "I am hoping that Mrs. Keith, or somebody else, will wake us up before this proposed shower is over. Now, mind, girls, not a whisper to Kitty. Mum's the word."

With Mrs. Cameron's help Mrs. Keith promptly discharged her commission to select the fancy work to be prepared for the "shower," and at her request the girls met the following evening to inspect her purchases. Somewhat to their disappointment, they found the shoppers had made a selection of perfectly plain, though elegant, material.

"Those fringed borders are perfect," commented Edith, "and will save buttonholing the edges, which

is the part I dislike; but it would be less work if the pattern were already stamped. Will each one have to stamp our own?"

"We brought these home on approval," explained Mrs. Keith, "as we could find nothing in so fine material, in the stamped patterns, though we visited several shops. I am going to suggest that you allow me to draw your several designs, one on each doily, and make them as simple as possible."

"But can you do that, grandmother?" asked Jessica, astonished.

For answer, Mrs. Keith took one of Don's drawing pencils and a sheet of paper from the table drawer, and a moment later a simple sketch of a wild rose, with a bud and a few leaves, appeared on the sheet.

"I thought of this plan, when I remembered that some of your number said they did not embroider," she said, and the sketch was handed around the table to receive unqualified endorsement. "A few fern leaves, in outline stitch, or a conventional design in the same, would be as pretty as embroidery and make a variety. That each one may have a fair show in the matter of selection, I suggest that the doilies be numbered, and each girl draw a numbered slip, choosing in the order of her number. Leave the matter open to exchange later, if anyone wishes."

This suggestion met with immediate favor.

"Mrs. Keith," asked Grace Snow, "when did you learn that we girls of the Helping Hand were exceedingly jealous of our rights and privileges?"

"I assure you I have that yet to learn, Miss Gracie," replied Mrs. Keith, "but I was a girl once myself, and I fear I often forgot the text, 'In honor preferring one another.'"

The girls looked at one another with conscious smiles.

"Did you know that that is the motto of our club?" inquired Jennie.

"I certainly must plead not guilty," she answered, with an embarrassed glance at Jessica. "I thought my granddaughter had given me the history of your club from 'Genesee to Reverberations,' as the old colored brother says, but there seems to have been one item omitted."

Jessica laughed with the rest, though she also flushed slightly.

"I thought of telling you the motto of our club one day, grandmother," she confessed, "and then I was ashamed to, for we do so little to show it."

"Never mind," returned Mrs. Keith, lightly. "Like the man who stepped into the hole in his friend's garden walk, which he had meant to tell him about, I have found it out for myself. Perhaps we can



make a practical application of it in parcelling out our work. I will draw them all for you tomorrow, as the time is so short, and you may come tomorrow evening and make your selections."

November's early chill was in the air, and gray skies ushered in the dawn of Kitty Leighton's fifteenth birthday; but *within* the elegant parlors of that favored young lady's home all was brightness and good cheer. Under Mrs. Keith's clever management the preparations for the party had gone smoothly forward with much less work and worry than usually accompany an affair of this kind. There had been scarcely a ripple of excitement in the several households, and the respective mothers voted Mrs. Keith an unmixed blessing!

Wise schemer that she was, she had gently but persistently declined the numerous and insistent invitations to be present at the birthday "shower," but had promised to look in upon them after the luncheon was over, then to unfold the plan for which she had asked their cöoperation when the "shower" was first proposed; and they had been obliged to be content with this.

The "shower" was a complete surprise to its recipient. A great amount of not very secret consultation had been indulged in concerning a suitable joint gift for Miss Kitty's birthday offering, which

had led her entirely astray as to the real plan of celebration. The girls had furnished the menu—a very simple one—and Kitty's father had obligingly taken her to the limit of the city for a birthday spin, that the preparations for the luncheon might be hastily completed at her home.

When she returned, her mother met her at the door with the announcement that Marjorie and Jessica had called, and she went to her room to dress, where she found a pretty new frock laid ready for the afternoon.

"Margie and Jessica, fudge!" she thought to herself, as an occasional smothered giggle was wafted up the stairway. "That whole bunch of kids is downstairs, if I know anything about it, and it is a party, or a tea, or—something. This is what they have been slipping around corners and whispering about for the last week, and I have been suspecting horrid things all the time!"

With the help of her mother's maid, she slipped hurriedly into the new dress, and went expectantly down. The drawing-room was empty; and she peeped into the dining-room. Sure enough, there was the "gang," seated at the table with Jessica at the head, and only the place of honor-guest still vacant.

Jessica rose with great dignity, and marshalled her to this seat, and, as Kitty afterward expressed

herself, her "nerve" all gone for a moment, she slipped shyly into the vacant chair amid a chorus of "Many happy returns!"

The luncheon was served at once. After it was concluded, and the dishes had been removed by the smiling maid, a ribbon attached to a very large fancy basket which had been suspended above the table throughout the spread, was put into Kitty's hand by the merry mistress of ceremonies, and she was invited to pull the string.

"I've been keeping one eye on that basket all through this 'eat,'" she remarked, doubtfully, "and I have guessed in my mind a hundred things it might contain. But I would really like someone else at the table to upset it."

"It isn't as dangerous as the sword of Damocles, Kitty," assured Jessica, "though you may think that it is before you get through with the stunt it will impose on your gray matter. And I assure you it hasn't a gold brick in it. Ready, one, two, three!" and yielding to their merry importunities Kitty gave the ribbon a vigorous pull. She was almost overwhelmed by an avalanche of floral offerings which were such excellent imitations of their natural sisters, even to perfume, that, as Kitty remarked, "the whole conservatory seems to have been upset."

"Each flower contains a remembrance from some

one present," explained Jessica. "You may open each one and appropriate the gift, only as you guess from the inscription on the written slip outside who is the giver."

"H—m! Quite an interesting program for every one present except 'yours truly!' " commented the recipient of the "shower," somewhat sarcastically. "If I must, however, I must; so here goes!" unfastening, as she spoke, a card from the flower lying nearest.

"The naughtiest, smallest, and homeliest too,  
Of the gang that roams on the avenue,  
Brings you good wishes, Kitty dear,  
To greet the morn of your fifteenth year."

"Am I supposed to recognize and point out one of those present from this description?" demanded Kitty, in great dismay. "Pray who hatched up this rude plot to set me back forever in the kind regards of my friends? But I think I see a way to evade such a dangerous possibility. Hazel, you are the 'smallest' of the gang, so I hereby deny and set aside your other adjectives as slanderous, and claim my right to search this charming posy for my rightful spoil."

Hazel laughingly assented, and Kitty shook from the depths of a great white lily the first of the set of doilies, with the monogram H. L. in the center surrounded by a wreath of dainty fern leaves.



"Your friends and companions bring greetings today,  
To a comrade and chum always pleasant and gay.  
As your past has been bright, may your future be brighter,  
And your life's page as fair as the name of this writer.  
May your pleasures be many, your sorrows not any.  
Please accept these best wishes! Your loving friend, ——"

Kitty promptly supplied the missing signature.

"Thank you, so much, for making it easy, Jen," she said, making a profound bow in Jennie's direction. "I am afraid I am in some danger of mental collapse before these flowers all shed their internal fragrance, so to speak," placing a wildrose doily by the side of the fern.

"Oh, thou transcendently lovely being, queen hollyhock of the hollyhock garden of girls, so to speak, deign to receive from one of the humblest of thy adoring admirers this slight tribute to the return of thy natal morn! Hail, glorious morn!"

This glowing apostrophe was folded about the stem of an immense, gorgeous hollyhock, and when Kitty had read it she laid it down and gasped for breath.

"Who would suppose anyone would ever pour out such a gusher for poor me! Mabel, this effusion could have originated nowhere except in your fertile brain," nodding her head in Mabel's direction. "Am I correct?"

Having extracted the doily in response to Mabel's

assent, Kitty still continued to separate the glowing leaves.

"There is but one piece in each flower," ventured Mabel. "What are you looking for, Kitty?"

"The dictionary you must have used," returned Kitty. "I thought it might have been included as a silent interpreter of the beautiful thought."

She proceeded to inspect the doily, which bore three beautifully wrought monograms.

"M. U. is for you, Mabel; K. L. is for me; but where does the H. H. come in?" questioned Kitty, with a puzzled frown. "Perhaps this is a quotation from Helen Hunt."

"Helen Hunt, nothing! Holly Hock, goosie," laughingly answered the donor. "I was long on monograms, and short on embroidering hollyhocks; so the H. H. monogram will remind you."

"The rose is red and so is my head;  
The violet's blue, and my eyes are, too.  
This rhyme is bum, for my wits are few,  
But I love you Kitty, I truly do.  
Accept best wishes from you know who."

"If I didn't, I would as soon as I saw this," responded Kitty as she held up a doily whose surface was almost covered by a glowing, red carnation. "Who ever loved carnations more than you do, Kathie, or can embroider them more beautifully?"

"I rather thought myself that I could 'do' carnations till I saw a centerpiece Jessica's grandmother did," answered Katherine, lightly. "Since then I have taken a back seat with my needlework."

"Who would presume to indite  
E'en to a chosen comrade some crude verse,  
When the great bard himself such wisdom lends  
As 'Pansies, that's for thoughts.' His views and mine are  
one."

Of course this offering was accompanied by a bunch of pansies, and Kitty gave a swift glance toward the head of the table as she laid it down and remarked, "It seems to me I recognize the fine, Italian hand of somebody's grandmother, in this high-flown tribute. How about it, Jessica?"

"Oh, it might have been her brother, but I think it was grandmother; yes, it could have been no other," chattered Marjorie. "Say, girls, don't you know it's just as easy to think in rhyme—"

"Be still, Margie!" cried Hazel, impatiently, "and let Kitty get on with her stunt! Mrs. Keith will be here directly."

"I am 'on' to this one," rejoined Kitty, holding up the pansy doily to show that in the center of each flower face Jessica had embroidered a diminutive 'J.' Kitty laid the favor aside with a last, loving pat.

"This simple little 'billy doo,'  
Herewith inscribed, dear Kit, to you,  
Contains some birthday wishes true.  
May all your skies be brightest blue,  
May fame be yours and riches too,  
Your friends be neither false nor few,  
Roses your crown, unmixed with rue,  
Fond lovers for your favor sue,  
Life's fairest flowers your pathway strew,  
And Fortune smile on all you do."

A gale of merry laughter went round the table as Kitty finished reading this medley of "best wishes."

"This is surely from the poet laureate of the gang," declared the reader. "It sounds as if you were wound up and couldn't stop until you were run down, Margie."

"I told you it was easy, if you just get started right," reaffirmed Marjorie.

"I'm sure I didn't find it so," was Edith's emphatic disclaimer. "Perhaps I didn't get rightly started."

"You just get the spelling book," explained Margie, "and find a list of words that sound alike, and put them down in a row. Then put some more words before each one that will say just what you want to say, and there you are!"

"Such an easy recipe!" jeered Edith. "You sure ought to get it patented, and put it on the market,



Margie. You would find a ready sale for it among lovers, and spring poets, and mutts like me!"

Margie's doily was sprinkled thick with blue forget-me-nots, and Kitty laughed as she laid it with the others.

"I'll always associate you with forget-me-nots and spelling-book poetry from this day on, Margie," she said.

"White rose, that blooms for Beauty's bower,  
I pluck, dear friend, for you,  
And bring to grace this festal hour,  
And prove my friendship true.  
Go to my friend, O lovely rose,  
And nestling in her hair  
Whisper sweet wishes from her chum,  
For future birthdays fair."

"This is like a fairy story being acted out before my eyes," said Kitty. "My chum," with a loving look at Edith, "has just tied another string to my affections, if I may so express myself," holding up Edith's offering, a doily with a single white rose, without bud or leaf.

"Warm are my wishes, though my name sounds chill;  
While birthdays come and go I'll love thee still."

"This hints of snow and other chilly things," remarked the recipient, shaking a mammoth snow-

ball, until the gift dropped out. "There isn't a dish of ice cream, or a real snowball, hidden somewhere in it, is there, Gracie dear?"

The last flower, a magnificent silk poppy, lay before Kitty, and she picked it up slowly, as though half-reluctant to bring to a close the afternoon's pleasure.

"An original couplet your birthday to grace,  
Is a task far too great for my brain.  
To frame up a ditty, both pleasing and witty,  
I have wooed all the muses in vain.  
So with many good wishes, and fifteen warm kisses,  
I'll close this effusion at once,  
To make out the label I'm sure you'll be able,  
For I'm only the Avenue Dunce."

Kitty sighed with pleasure, as she extracted the poppy-bordered bit of fancy work from its silken envelope.

"Leaving out those already guessed, guessing is getting easy," she commented. "Though I could never assign the dunce cap to anyone who can woo the Muse like that, Helen. This has certainly been the most perfect birthday greeting I ever had, or ever *saw had*," she continued.

"Jessica, a little bird whispered to me that you were the prime mover in this series of birthday surprises. How can I ever thank you properly?"

"You do me too much honor," answered Jessica.

"The originator of most of the ideas, and many of the arrangements, fastened her birthday remembrance in the bottom of the basket, and I think you overlooked it."

Kitty immediately fished under the table for the supposedly empty basket and, having untied the ribbon which had confined it, drew from its depth a dainty booklet. In the center of the chamois-skin cover the letters "D. K." and "K. L." were skilfully interwoven in pyrography, with a simple border of pansies. Opening the book, Kitty was delighted to find that each page contained a water color of one of the flowers that had been used in the "shower," with its accompanying inscription written below in elegant text, each signed with the giver's own autograph. On the flyleaf was inscribed, in golden lettering in Old English text, "May every link in the chain of your friendships be of purest gold. D. K.," and the group of girls that crowded around Kitty for inspection of this pretty memento seemed to feel that the wish were not alone for the recipient of the birthday favor.

"What a beautiful thought!" exclaimed Kitty, "to put all these lovely remembrances in such a permanent form! Nobody but Mrs. Keith could have planned and carried out such a perfect idea! It will always be a sort of echo of this happy afternoon!"

“That’s what grandmother said,” rejoined Jessica, shyly. “She said the flowers would spoil, and the written slips could not be easily preserved; but this booklet would keep, to remind you when you were old of your fifteenth birthday and how it was celebrated.”



## CHAPTER XII

### THE GIOVANNIS' THANKSGIVING

JESSICA, in the daintiest of party attire, had scarcely left her home for the Leightons' on that eventful afternoon, when Grandmother Keith went out also, taking, however, a different direction. From the aristocratic home of the Camerons to the squalid shack of Pietro Giovanni was scarcely a five-minute walk, and she soon paused on the rude step. Knocking lightly at the door and meeting with no response, she confidently lifted the latch and went in.

Little Guido lay asleep on an old cot near the window; and, at first glance, Mrs. Keith saw no one else in the room. But a moment later Beatrice rose from the floor by her brother's side, and the visitor noted at once that she had been crying. In her heart, as she took in the girl's cheerless surroundings, she did not wonder why. All the dreariness and gloom of the dull November day seemed to pervade the miserable room.

She went straight to the drooping figure, and took the reluctant hands in her own ungloved, compas-

sionate ones. This was not by any means her first visit, unaccompanied, to the Giovanni home; but she had never before met on Beatrice's part anything but the most cheerful indifference to the wretchedness of her surroundings.

"Something is troubling you, Beatrice," she said, in her gentle, direct way. "Is the little brother sick?"

The girl shook her head, with a weary glance in the direction of the cot.

"Sit down, then, and tell me just what is the matter," continued the visitor, seating herself, and drawing the young girl to a chair by her side. "I came on purpose to have a long talk with you this afternoon, and I have something very nice indeed to tell you."

The sweet face, which Beatrice had already learned to love, the sympathetic tones, the warm clasp of the kind hands, overcame the girl's reserve, and five minutes later she was sobbing out all her pain and discouragement on the motherly shoulder, as freely as Jessica would have done had that fortunate young lady had any troubles worth mentioning. Her ignorance of her work and its ever increasing burdens, the poverty of her home and its surroundings, the lack of clothes for her brothers and sister, that they might go to school and "look-a like the others," and, last but not least,

her father's discouragement with her management of the home. It had been so much better under his wife's superior knowledge, and his discouragement had grown into impatience until, that morning, he had done what he had never done before in her life, he had struck her and called her "a good-for-nothing lazy bambino!"

Mrs. Keith was nearly in tears herself when the child—for she was scarcely more—finished her sorrowful story, and gave way to a fresh burst of sobs. As Beatrice's present condition of mind, however, was most favorable for the success of her now well-matured plans, the kindly visitor sat for a few minutes with her arm laid tenderly about the girl's shoulders, letting the tears flow unchecked. Then she said gently, "You will let me help you, will you not, Beatrice, to change all this, and make you and your brothers and sister comfortable for the winter?"

The poor girl lifted her head dazedly. There was much confidence in the kindly tones, and new hope sprang suddenly in her heart. This gentle stranger had never crossed the threshold of her cheerless home that her coming had not brought some added measure of comfort to its inmates.

"How?" she queried, directly.

"That is what I have come to tell you this afternoon," answered the lady. "In a way that you will

understand and enjoy, I am sure. But I must count on your help, too."

Then, in the simplest language at her command, Mrs. Keith explained to the poor Italian girl the arrangements, now fully completed, for a better home, and a fuller measure of comfort therein for the coming winter. Beatrice could hardly believe her senses. Mrs. Keith readily obtained her promise to say nothing of the new arrangement to her father until the building should be made ready to be moved, as it would be very shortly. The heart-to-heart talk lasted until the shadows began to lengthen in the little room, and then, leaving the occupant of the cheerless home with bright, dry eyes, and a far more hopeful heart than she had had at her coming, Mrs. Keith recalled her promise to be at the Leightons' at five, and hurried away. She met the small "Mafia"—as Don persisted in calling the Giovanni brood—at the door, coming noisily in from an afternoon in the street; and, giving them a handful of pennies to buy cakes at the corner grocery on the street below them, she went on her way to her later appointment.

In the Leightons' handsome library, where they might be secure from interruption, she found the members of the Helping Hand Mission eagerly waiting the unfolding of her secret.

"It's something awfully solemn," whispered



Jessica to Marjorie, under cover of the pleasant greetings of the others. "I never knew gramsie to look like that unless she had something tremendous on her mind!"

Jessica was quite right. Mrs. Keith's womanly heart had been stirred to its depths by what she had heard and seen that afternoon. Though her western experiences had accustomed her to the sight of comparative poverty, the conditions prevailing in the Giovanni home, located so near the abodes of wealth, were a revelation to her, and in her fairness of mind she resented these conditions.

She was not long, therefore, in unburdening her mind. Having congratulated the possessor of the new birthday, and replied to the merry greetings of the rest, she settled herself in the big, easy chair Kitty brought forward, and drawing from her handbag her tatting shuttle, "to point her remarks," as Jessica said, she began. Without any preliminaries, she rehearsed the scene through which she had passed just before coming to them. The sight of the happy, care-free girls, children of luxurious homes with every normal wish gratified, coupled with the memory of what she had heard and seen within the hour, gave her added eloquence. Why should they have so much, and that poor girl, in her need, so little? Before she had finished her

graphic word-picture of conditions at the Giovanni home there were tears in more than one pair of bright eyes.

"I am very glad I feel so well acquainted already with the Helping Handers," she concluded, glancing around over the quiet group, "for I know there is not one heart here this afternoon that does not ache with mine over poor Beatrice's troubles, and not one pair of hands that will not work cheerfully in odd minutes, until her more serious difficulties are relieved."

Marjorie was first to speak.

"Tell us what we can do, Mrs. Keith," she begged, "and let us get to work at once. It seems so strange; but when we planned this 'shower' for Kitty, we girls got to talking about our general uselessness, and carelessness, and hoped you would wake us up some way."

"I have never thought girls were either useless or careless from choice," replied Mrs. Keith. "But they often fail to do, because their attention has not been called to the outside duty, as we might call it, and because their own pleasures or duties crowd out the less obvious ones."

"You are mighty nice to look at it in that way, Mrs. Keith," said Hazel. "But you are smothering the truth. Every one of us knows, and has known for some time, just what kind of a life that poor

Italian girl has to lead; and while any one of us would have been glad to have it otherwise, we have been too indifferent to put out a hand to help her."

"Well, there's nothing like knowing our shortcomings, Hazel," remarked Marjorie, "or being told of them in an upright, downright fashion. So, if Mrs. Keith has some plan for us to help her carry out, as I imagine she has, I would like somebody to move that we resolve ourselves into ten pairs of Helping Handers to do as she wishes. Though I doubt if my mother will give her consent to my going near Pietro's domicile. She is as afraid of Italian microbes as I am of a mouse."

"It will not be necessary for you to go to their house at present," replied Mrs. Keith, "and before it is I think you will not recognize the place. Mr. Cameron has a discarded storehouse which I have obtained his consent to add to Pietro's house. It is to be fitted up into two comfortable rooms, a kitchen and a living-room. The laddies of Donald's manual-training class will remodel it. Before it is moved I shall call on you Helping Handers to ransack your garrets for discarded furniture, any of which, I imagine, will be better than what the Giovannis possess at present.

"Just now, I shall make no more demand on your time or patience than to ask you to forego the pleasures of your Saturday vacation for a couple

of weeks, and meet with Mrs. Cameron and myself to help replenish the little Giovannis' wardrobe. It is sadly lacking in comfortable garments for the coming winter and I am certain you can each interest your respective mothers to the extent of giving you cast-off or out-grown clothes that can be made over to meet their needs. I have also quite a little new material promised, which we will make up. So, if you wish to resolve yourselves into a temporary sewing circle of ten, we will work something larger than doilies with our needles. One thing more, dear girls, I wish to say nobody is under obligation to take part in this work, if she does not find it easy or convenient to do so. I am sure there will be enough volunteers to put it through in a short time at the farthest; for I shall not stop until the Giovanni tribe is warm for the winter."

Kitty Leighton rose suddenly.

"I move you, Madame President," she said, "that Mrs. Keith be tendered the position of Honorary President of this club during her stay in Cleveland; and that we, as a club, pledge ourselves to work under her leadership in any way she may see fit to use us."

Ignoring the gentle protest which came from their visitor, Marjorie promptly put the question, and it was carried by a chorus of "ayes," and a vigorous clapping of hands.



"That motion makes me feel as though I have just been made queen of an unlimited monarchy," said Mrs. Keith, when she was allowed to speak. "I do not see how I can do less than accept its honors, with the promise that I shall try not to exceed my authority. Your really overwhelming acceptance of my plan is most grateful to me, and will be appreciated still more by those for whom we labor."

"We have a fund, Mrs. Keith," suggested Mabel, "which might be used for more material, if necessary. We girls pay dues of ten cents a month, which amounts to quite a sum in the course of a year. As we have not been very active in dispensing it the past summer, I think there is quite a sum in our treasury."

"Perhaps you would do better to keep that for an emergency fund for Christmas time," replied Mrs. Keith. "What is needed more than anything else, at present, is willing hands to use a needle."

A few general arrangements were completed, and the Helping Handers went to their homes in a very different mood, it is just to them to say, than that in which they had come together for a social afternoon. Mrs. Cameron had stopped for her mother, with the car, but Jessica preferred to walk, and she and Marjorie strolled home together.

"Wasn't that the funniest ending to a party that

you ever experienced, kid?" asked Marjorie, after they had separated from the others at the Sheldon corner. "Some surprise all along the line. I feel as solemn as though I had been to church!"

"I never knew anybody that could get more awfully in earnest over people like the Giovannis than grandmother can," replied Jessica, thoughtfully. "She makes you feel, somehow, as though you *must* do something for them, or you would not dare to say your prayers at night. She was talking about the Lord's Prayer the other night, and she said some people pray, 'Thy kingdom come on earth,' every night of their lives; but they never do anything to help to make it come true."

"I had never thought about it that way, either," admitted Marjorie. "What about our painting lesson Saturday? I suppose it will have to be laid aside for the sewing bee, too!"

"No, gramsie said we were to have it at nine-thirty in the morning, if that would suit you. But I hope everyone will come in the afternoon to sew, for I can't help feeling that our letting those Giovannis go so long that way is a sort of slam on our neighborhood; and I want to get them off my mind."

"Oh, we'll all come," responded Marjorie, as she turned the corner and waved "good-bye" to Jessica. "Even if we didn't care for that dirty tribe, which

we do now, I hope, we'd all get good and busy for your grandmother's sake."

The ball of mission work once started, it was wonderful how rapidly it rolled. Not only every one of the club members, but five volunteers of mammas and big sisters were on hand in Mrs. Cameron's sewing-room on the following Saturday—"an overflow meeting," as Marjorie remarked. As Mrs. Keith was provided with the length, breadth, and thickness of all the young Giovannis, and with a small bundle of paper patterns, it was also wonderful how fast the partly worn garments brought in by the members, as well as the big bundle of new material which had been paid for by Mr. Cameron and a few of his neighbors, grew into warm garments of varying sizes. Three of the busy girl workers looked with special pride on their share of the afternoon labors—twelve pairs of warm stockings, all mended, as Jessica expressed it, "with neatness and despatch."

It was decided by a committee of the older ones that the new house was to be rebuilt and furnished on its present site, and moved to its new location afterward. Accordingly, on the next Saturday morning, shortly after daylight, there was an invasion of Mr. Cameron's yard by a small army of Manual students, headed by a keen-eyed, alert young man of twenty-five years. This force of workmen

took possession of the old storehouse, and before night it was reconstructed within and without.

Not wishing to take any chances on her forces diminishing, Mrs. Keith and her daughter served luncheon to the busy workmen in the Cameron dining-room. Jessica and Marjorie, their painting lesson finished, proudly added themselves to the kitchen force, making most acceptable waiters. Not a boy "flunked," until, just at sunset, the last nail was driven and the teacher declared the work completed. It is safe to say some of the boys had probably done the hardest day's work of their lives.

The house had been divided into two rooms, which were ceiled throughout. Several windows and a couple of doors had been added; and a plain, but roomy and attractive, porch converted the barnlike structure into a very homey-looking dwelling.

Promptly with the afternoon had come the sewing club, with still larger accessions of interested workers. Garments which had been taken home to be completed were returned finished. Additions were made which had been overlooked at the previous meeting. And the great basketful of clothing, which was to be taken to its destination in time for a Thanksgiving surprise, was a source of much satisfaction to the girl workers, as they inspected it and chattered over it before leaving the Cameron home that evening.



Mrs. Keith's arm went lightly about Marjorie's waist as she still stood after the others had departed, looking thoughtfully at the array.

"Which is more fun, going to a Saturday matinee, or sewing for your neighbors?" she asked archly; and for answer Marjorie turned suddenly and flung her arms about her questioner's neck.

"Do you know what I was thinking, Mrs. Keith?" she asked.

"No; but you looked so very serious, for you, that I think I should like to know."

"Well," answered the girl soberly, "I was thinking what an utterly selfish, hard-hearted set of girls we were, until you came here and showed us our shortcomings in such a beautiful way. And I don't think I shall want to go to another matinee, until I know that there is not another cold, half-starved child in Cleveland!"

Mrs. Keith bent to kiss the earnest face upturned to hers.

"Matinees are all right in their place, dear, and it will be many years, if ever, before there will be no poverty to relieve in your beautiful city, Margie. But I am sure you will not regret any self-denial your part in this work may have cost you, when you see the reception of your Helping Handers' good deed next week. The text which may oftenest occur to each one of you might well be, 'She hath

done what she could,' for such generous response to an appeal for helpfulness was never known to me before. And now, as you are to take dinner with Jessica, we have just time to run down to Pietro's, and notify him of the change which is about to be made for the comfort of his flock. Mr. Hall tells me that the house is all ready to be moved, but I think we will put in the furnishings first."

"May I really go with you?" cried Marjorie. "Oh, won't that be jolly! I can't think of anything I would like better! Won't it be funny to see how surprised he will be?"

Mrs. Keith did not answer, but calling Jessica she set out with the two girls. Beatrice had kept her secret well, and "surprised" Pietro certainly was. The family were all at home, sitting over a very scanty supper of black bread, boiled macaroni, and stale fruit. Mrs. Keith at once made known the object of her call.

"I have just run in to tell you, Mr. Giovanni," she said, "that Mr. Pantello has bought a new house for you. He will have it moved early next week, and set in front of this one, which you can still use for sleeping rooms, after he has made some changes in them."

The poor Italian did not understand.

"I cannot pay for more house!" he exclaimed. "I cannot now but pay the rent—it is so much—

and a new house, it would be more, much-a more."

"There will be no rent to pay at all," assured Mrs. Keith. "Your neighbors and friends have arranged with Mr. Pantello that you are to have the use of this place, and the two lots next to it, for a year without rent; and the new house will have such things in it as you will need. This will give you all you earn, for a while, to feed your family. See, I have brought you the lease," taking a folded paper from her muff, "which you should keep in some safe place, or let Mr. Cameron keep for you. It says you are to have the free use of this place until a year from next January. Perhaps by that time, since you are so saving and work so hard, you may be able to buy a little home of your own."

Still half dazed, Pietro reached out his hand and took the paper she extended. Then he broke forth into a torrent of grateful speech—a broken mixture of English and his mother-tongue—and a moment later turned his back upon the trio, and burst into tears!

Mrs. Keith turned to Beatrice, whose face was glowing with a joy that transfigured it. After a few pleasant words for her and the others, she drew her companions outside, and the three walked some distance in silence. Marjorie's eyes were bright with tears, but she broke the silence at last by saying impetuously, "I never want to see anyone sur-

prised that way again, as long as I live! I don't know how I could think it would be *funny!*"

"There are more tragedies than comedies in such lives as those of the Giovannis," replied Mrs. Keith gravely, "when we take pains to look behind the curtain."

"I never realized before how much good people can do with a little money," remarked Jessica. "And brains," she added.

"And a desire to be of service," said Mrs. Keith. "You girls are realizing the truth of the divine declaration that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The following Monday there was a great ransacking of garrets and storerooms for furniture for the new house. Once the entire neighborhood was interested, it was wonderful what a serviceable collection of useful articles were gathered at short notice, and how a half-day with paint and varnish put the donations in harmony with one another. Mrs. Keith herself supervised the furnishing of the room intended for the joint kitchen and dining-room. Every article in it was selected for the especial use of the young housekeeper, who was to receive a fresh inspiration for cleanliness and order in its spick-and-span tidiness.

The new house was moved the following day, and, as soon as the family could vacate the old house,



the proprietor, true to his promise, had the rooms rearranged to make three comfortable sleeping rooms.

A short time before dark, on the evening preceding Thanksgiving, the Helping Handers, with Mrs. Keith in the lead, and the "Boys' Auxiliary" bringing up the rear, invaded the Italian's home. With the boys to manage the great baskets of clothing and of needed provisions, the girls popped gayly in and proceeded to take possession. Paying no attention to Pietro's broken American protest, they put him in a corner and held him there, while others of the party speedily emptied a well-filled basket upon the table. Assembling the astonished children around it, they led the father to the head of the table, while Mrs. Keith waved her hand for silence and made a little speech.

"We are put into the world to help one another, Mr. Giovanni," she began gently, "and as these girls had but little to do they wished to help you and Beatrice, who is just about of their age. The warm clothes they have brought you for your motherless little ones have been made by their own kind hands. They wish you to take them and use them through the cold winter, feeling that they, too, are your warm friends, who will be glad to help you more at any time. We will bid you good night now, and hope you will enjoy your new home, and

what we have done, as much as we have enjoyed doing it."

Poor Mr. Giovanni tried to speak; he opened his lips, but the words refused to come. When the addition to his uncomfortable little home had been put in place, already furnished with plain but substantial furniture from the homes of his well-to-do neighbors, he had gone to Mr. Cameron and poured out thanks both profuse and earnest. But tonight, as he saw the smiling faces of his children, and took in the possibilities of the great basket of clothing, this last measure of generous kindness was too much for his feelings. He could make no response to the words of this kindly woman who had realized for him, in so short a time, his only ambition—home and comfort for his motherless children.

Mrs. Keith saw and understood. Beckoning to the group, she went quietly out, closing the door herself softly behind the last one. Outside, her eyes swept with a tender glance over the circle of half-tearful but happy faces, turned to hers in the soft glow of the Thanksgiving twilight.

"My blessed Helping Handers!" she breathed, tenderly. "Never doubt that of you it was said long ago, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.' "

## CHAPTER XIII

### CHRISTMAS "GOODFELLOWS"

THE flutter and excitement of the Thanksgiving festivities were scarcely past when the Cameron children began to look forward to the coming Christmas holidays. This anniversary was now but two weeks distant, and the note of preparation for it had been sounded for some time. It was part of the unwritten law of the household that there were to be no "peekings" or questionings at this time, and the rule was strictly observed by all but Harry. With his faith in the good patron saint still unquestionably firm, and with encouragement from Don and Jessica, for the fun of it, there were sometimes absurd complications.

"What you makin', dranma?" he queried one evening, as grandma's fingers slid swiftly in and out of a somewhat shapeless tangle of bright wool. Bent on counting stitches at the time, Mrs. Keith answered abstractedly, "A pair of bedroom slippers, Harry, woolly ones, like Jessica's, to slip on at bedtime, you know."

"You goin' to wear 'em?"

"No, dear; I am going to send them to a friend of mine out in Kansas, for a Christmas present."

"You goin' to be Santy Taus, dranma?" pursued the small questioner, so earnestly that grandma suddenly waked up.

"Oh, bless you no, darling; but Santa is so busy this time of the year, and grandma's friend is grown up and has five little folks for Santa to look after, so I shall send her these slippers when I get them done, to tell her that I love her yet, and think of the things she likes. She was once a little girl who went to school to me, and I taught her to read and write." Noticing that Jessica was listening interestedly, she added, "This friend was very fond of pretty trifles when she was a girl, and her mother indulged her tastes in that direction as long as she was at home; but she is the wife of a ranchman now, with a number of little ones, and has but little leisure for making such things, and not any too much money to buy them."

The question of Santa Claus' personality seemed safely sidetracked for the time; but a few days later Jessica turned Harry's ideas topsy-turvy again, by a careless remark.

"Do you s'pose Santy Taus will bwing Jacky a Trismus present?" he asked, as the two sat together in the garage, where Jackie had his winter



quarters, watching him enjoy a dish of bread and milk.

"We'll have to get him some lettuce at the hot-house," answered his sister, "and give him some extra fine cabbage leaves. Maybe we might dig down under the snow, and find him some grass that is not quite spoiled yet."

"Why don't Santy Taus bwing him dust what he wants?" insisted the child. "Mamma says he always knows."

"Maybe he will," responded Jessica, catching him in her arms, and bestowing a kiss on the red lips. "What would you like him to bring you, Muggins?"

"Anuvver Jill," came the prompt reply. Harry's heart had been very sore since the chilly November morning when the children, coming to the garage to feed their pets, had found Lady Jill unresponsive to their morning greetings, two baby bunnies, also still and cold, nestled against her soft fur.

"*They're* sure all gone to rabbit-heaven," Don had murmured sadly, and had gone hastily away to make arrangements for their burial. That had been a month before, and papa had predicted the same dire fate for Jackie before the winter was past, but though he seemed lonely without his mate he was still thriving.

Donald had transferred his claim in the rabbit to Harry at once, for his small brother's grief was

pitiable to witness. If tender care could avail, Jackie seemed likely to survive to welcome the spring. No little animal could receive more careful attention than Donald bestowed on Harry's pet, and his kindness was having its effect in the added devotion of the child to his older brother.

"I wote a letter to Santy Taus, and papa put it in the post office, to have him bwing me a mate for Jackie," continued the little boy.

"I don't believe it will do any good, Harry boy, for Santa Claus could hardly find you a jack rabbit this time of year. Grandma got yours in the summertime you know."

"But he might buy one somewhere."

"I am afraid not. Papa would buy you one for Christmas, if he could get it, and not wait for Santa Claus to bring it."

This remark evidently set a new train of thought in motion in Harry's active mind.

"Mamma," he asked, later, as he watched his mother run up the seams in his new flannel sleeping-bag, "Does Santy Taus bwing everybody evwything they want?"

"Bless you no, Harry! He couldn't do that, if he had twice as much money and time for Christmas gifts. Why?"

"'Cause I asted Don what he wanted Santy to bwing him, and he said a dreat bid book of picsers

of houses, that's down town—dust 'bones' of houses, like Don makes when he draws. He said he wanted that worse'n anyfing; and I thought if Santy Taus didn't know about it you might take the pennies from my bank and det it for him."

Mrs. Cameron's eyes beamed a world of mother-love on the upturned face, but she only answered, quietly, "I thought you wanted those pennies to get you some new tin soldiers, Harry."

"I did, but I'd ravver Don'd have 'em for a book of house picsters."

His mother bent and kissed him.

"You are a dear, kind boy, Harry, to think of Don; but I think Santa will bring him the book he wants without your pennies having to go for it."

Harry suddenly clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Oh, I fordot!" he exclaimed. "Don told me not to tell anybody. I'm so sorry I fordot!"

"Never mind," comforted mamma. "I won't tell anyone you told, and we'll try to get word to Santa Claus about it before Christmas." And Harry went away to his play to reflect seriously on this last statement.

"What do you suppose you have put us Helping Handers up to doing now, you blessed grandmother?" asked Jessica that night as she toasted her feet at grandmother's fire before hopping into bed.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, or nothing you do not wish to do," in a tone of mock anxiety. "May I be enlightened?"

"You are making us forget ourselves again, as you did when we gave up a matinee and a painting lesson to sew for your Italians," laughed Jessica.

"You might do a great deal of that sort of 'forgetting yourselves,' " replied Mrs. Keith, seriously, "without injury to your moral well-being. Will you explain?"

"Well, we talked it all over at Marjorie's last night, and we have agreed not to get a single Christmas present this year for any one outside of our own folks; and, with the money we save that way, to get some really needy person the thing we think she would like best or need most."

"But where do I and the 'making' part come in?"

"Why, you see," she said, flushing shyly, "I was telling the girls about those slippers you were making for that friend who likes such things so well, but cannot have them easily. And then we talked, and concluded we would try this plan. Do you like it, gramsie?"

"I think it is a charming one," she answered, earnestly, "and I am proud to have been, even indirectly, the moving spirit of the thought.

"I have often wondered why well-to-do people bestow such expensive gifts on their friends and



acquaintances at the holiday season, and, as often, ignore altogether the claims of the poor and needy who should be remembered at this time. My Helping Handers will love each other just as much for this mutual self-sacrifice, and when you reflect that your efforts have made ten other people happy, you will not regret this change in your usual Christmas plan. It is not a new one to me, but is being followed more and more by sensible people who see the folly of extensive present-giving. Then, too, you will no doubt find much pleasure in securing a suitable 'subject' for your Christmas remembrance, and in finding one will doubtless find more. Have you any one in view?"

Jessica hesitated a moment, then answered, "Yes, gramsie, I have. It is that old lady Jamison who lives in the block just east of us. I know her daughter that she lives with gives her everything she needs; but the other day, when I was coming home from Margie's, I had a couple of hothouse roses which Margie had slipped from the dining-room (they had had a swell guest for dinner), and as I came past Mrs. Jamison's she was sitting in the window, and she looked so longingly at my roses that I ran in and gave them to her.

"She cried, gramsie, she actually did, and then she laughed a little. She said she loved flowers, especially roses; but her daughter didn't care for

flowers around to muss up the house, and her rheumatism didn't let her get out much, and so she seldom saw any. I would like to carry her a whole bunch of American Beauties Christmas morning, just for her to look at until they spoil. Would that be a silly thing to do? I have two dollars for my special 'subject,' as you called her. That would buy quite a few, wouldn't it?"

"With a small reinforcement from gramsie's purse, it will buy enough to make a flower-loving woman's Christmas a very happy one," was the satisfactory reply.

This would be Mrs. Keith's first Christmas with her daughter since her marriage. Her presence and merry good humor lent an unusual zest to the preparations for the coming anniversary, and her suggestions and advice were in demand by every member of the family; her many "experiences" enabling her to be of infinite service.

She had brought with her a photograph of a rustic bridge near Mrs. Cameron's early home in Kansas; and with her assistance Jessica was making a very creditable copy of it in water color for her mother's Christmas gift. The young artist had spared no pains to deserve the extra time she had given to her art work by close attention to her lessons at their appointed hours; and when her school report came in at the end of the second quarter it was

a surprise to everyone but grandmother, who had seen much of the girl student's efforts, and had aided them so intelligently that Jessica's gratitude was unbounded.

She slipped the report into her papa's hand after the family had gone to the library for the evening, the day it was received. He looked it over carefully, then turned to her with much show of indignation.

"I have already received an intimation that you have astonished your family by bringing home a report without a 'medium' on it. May I inquire what you mean by robbing your brother of his prestige in the matter of reports, in such an outspoken—no, outwritten—fashion? I shall see that his wounded feelings are soothed by a double portion of Christmas turkey. As for you, I think that your name should be cancelled on all Santa Claus' orders for such an unheard-of proceeding."

There was a suspicious brightness in papa's eyes as he returned the card, and Jessica saw, as she had not seen before, how much interested he was in her advancement, and how proud of her recent progress in her studies.

"You should give grandmother the credit, papa," put in Donald. "She has kept at the 'family half-wit' [Jessica had given herself this name] from rosy morn to dewy eve, with the same old text, 'Get

knowledge, and with all thy wisdom get understanding,' or words to that effect, until even a rock would have absorbed instruction!"

"The seed was sown in good ground," affirmed grandmother, "and if I read the signs aright no one is more delighted than 'the family bookworm,' [This was Jessica's nickname for her brother.] that he is obliged to look sharply this winter to his educational laurels."

Donald bowed gravely in grandmother's direction.

"Thank you for crediting me with such a generous disposition! I will confess that the reflections cast on the family occasionally by the low rating, educationally speaking, of one of its members have been more or less painful to some of her more ambitious relatives; and this marked improvement is—is—mother, will you please hand me that eraser?"

"Well," rejoined Mr. Cameron, when the laugh had subsided, "I am loth to change the subject, but I have been expecting for several days to be held up for Christmas funds—donations, if you prefer—and I have about concluded to invite the fatal blow. How much will it require this year, Jessica, to remember the dear five hundred friends? I need scarcely add that in the light of the recent rise of educational stock I am inclined to be extremely liberal."



Jessica laughed gayly at her father's comments.

"I am making all my Christmas gifts this year, papa. I have them nearly all done already, so I will not need money to buy with."

"Making them? And don't 'makings' cost anything?"

"Not nearly so much as 'buyings,'" returned Jessica, demurely. "Then, too, as Don and I have not been attending many entertainments this fall, we have saved quite a good deal of our allowance," with a roguish look at her brother, who grinned responsively.

Mr. Cameron whistled softly.

"My son notified me some time ago that he would not require his usual Christmas 'hand-out,' for goodness knows what reason. 'Making his own,' too, I presume. My family is a continual surprise to me. Mother, I am inclined to lay much of this irregularity of action at your door. It seems to be more pronounced this year than usual. I notice, also, that my daughter has caught the contagion of your excessive industry. Have you been giving her a few lessons in Scotch thrift, also, and the conservation of time, as well as 'readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic'?" This he said as he watched Jessica's slim fingers shaping the cover of a gayly colored worsted ball intended for Harry's Christmas stocking.

"According to the latest advices your son and daughter have, all unknowingly, joined the Royal Order of Goodfellows," answered his mother. "This necessitates a change in their usual Christmas program, which may be something of a disappointment to their intimate friends, but which is a favorable one for your purse and their own holiday happiness."

The entire family looked somewhat mystified.

"Who or what is 'The Royal Order of Goodfellows,' gramsie?" asked Jessica, presently. "If we belong to a secret society we want to know it, don't we, Don?"

"False accusation!" declared Donald, concisely.

"In a large city out West," continued Mrs. Keith, "there has been for several years an organization of well-to-do business men, calling themselves 'Goodfellows,' who make it a point to hunt up some particularly needy or deserving persons or families, and see to it individually that their needs are supplied at the holiday season. The number of Goodfellows has yearly grown larger, and last year they co-operated with the mayor and the donations ran into the thousands of dollars. The motor cars of wealthy men, with the owners themselves as chauffeurs, dispensed this holiday cheer in many instances, and several hundred families were made happy and comfortable at the Christmas season. Clothing,

provisions, and toys were carried to the homes, and it was the proud boast of the city, after Christmas had passed, that, so far as known, not one poor or destitute person in the city had been overlooked."

"That would be a good scheme to set in motion on a small scale in our office," said Mr. Cameron, thoughtfully. "I have in mind one subject, already. Meyers, our janitor, had his foot crushed early in the fall, by a box of castings. As he has quite a large family, and his wife had been sick, we have made up among the office force several little purses which we have had some trouble in getting him to accept. He is about again, now, with the aid of a crutch, and with the help of his oldest boy is again on the job. But if you are chief of this royal order, mother, as I imagine you are, I think I must take you down to the Meyers' home some morning, to find out just what is the best Christmas help we could offer. They are both too proud to accept help at any other time, without protest."

"If your office force is half as enthusiastic in the matter of giving as Jessica's club was in the case of the 'Mafia,' it will give me much pleasure to assist in pulling the strings for their Christmas cheer," replied his mother.

"As my family is so independent this year in the matter of finances, I can be unusually generous myself, in the way of outside donations; and as our

office force numbers about twenty, I think I can assure you liberal contributions. This will give you and the motor a job on Christmas eve, Don," he added, "as chief dispenser of the—What did you call them, mother?—Goodfellows?"

"That will be O. K.," agreed Donald, "if I can dump the stuff outside, toot my horn, and fly. Since Thanksgiving eve I draw the line at delivering my bounty, or anyone else's for that matter, inside the door and waiting for thanks to be returned for it."

"By the way, with the janitor's case disposed of, what are we to do for our Italian band in the way of Christmas cheer?" inquired mamma. "Or shall we rest on our laurels so far as they are concerned, and leave them to chance and the tender charity of the Mission Sunday School?"

"The word 'charity' was forbidden by grandmother long ago in connection with our Italians," remarked Jessica. "We had a special meeting of the club after school last night to consider this very question. We decided we must do something, but did not make up our minds exactly what."

"I think we ought to put them up a Christmas tree," declared Don. "Nothing on it but goodies and pretties and knick-knacks—just a small one—so they won't begin to think that everything we do for them is plain charity."



"That is a good idea, Don, and one that would be easy to carry out," agreed Mrs. Keith. "It can be made ready two or three days beforehand, and set aside, so we would not be so crowded with work at the last minute. Why not use your club evening for the decorating? You might propose it to the others tomorrow, Jessica, and be sure to give the boy 'Goodfellows' a hand in the game."

Saturday morning Mrs. Keith presented herself at the breakfast table in street costume.

"Is not this the morning we are to interview the janitor's lady, to ascertain her Christmas needs?" she inquired.

"I declare, I had forgotten all about Meyers!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron. "I spoke to a number of the force about him, however, and they are ready to be at least accessory to the 'Goodfellow' stunt. Donald, you may take grandmother and me down in the car, and then you can use it afterward for your shopping, if you wish."

The morning was a perfect one, crisp and sharp, but sunny; and there were so many errands that Donald and the motor were kept busy until luncheon time.

Before their return home Mrs. Keith made her report at the office—not a very cheerful one, however—and the interest it awakened among the office

workers showed that the Christmas spirit had infected even the business houses.

"They seem to be fairly well supplied with clothing, except shoes," she reported, "but they are short on bedding, and have but little ahead in the house to eat. It seems Mrs. Meyers was sick in fruit season, and failed to secure her winter fruit as usual. As he has not been at work until recently they have had little to buy provisions with."

Business was suspended for a few precious minutes, and it was arranged that a donation of canned fruit should be gathered from the homes of the force, and a collection taken to buy several pairs of warm blankets. Arrangements were made to have the supplies brought to the office the day preceding Christmas, and there was almost a strife among the employes as to who should deliver the goods.

Much to Don's delight, the matter of delivery was finally left to him and his boy friends on the avenue. Before the arrival of the appointed time, such an accumulation of necessities had been donated for the janitor there was scarcely room for all in the motor car.

Donald's plan for a Christmas tree for Pietro's flock was enthusiastically received by the club members, who invaded the Cameron home in a noisy "committee of the whole" the following evening for instructions from their honorary president.

Mrs. Keith had evidently had extended experience in the matter of Christmas trees, for within an hour the work of preparing this one was so systematized and divided up among the willing workers that it seemed—as Marjorie observed—"half done already."

The "Boys' Auxiliary," as Don laughingly dubbed his mates on the avenue, offered to furnish the tree, and three days before Christmas it was ready to be transported to its destination. The Home Amusement Club gave one entire evening to its arrangement, and a merry evening it surely was! The dining-room at the Cameron home was given over to the workers; and, with grandmother moving about among the busy groups, advising here and suggesting there, and Harry—who, for the first time was witnessing the growth of a Christmas tree—plunging about, wildly excited, in everybody's way, it was a pleasant picture.

So thought Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, as they sat together in the library, where they had full view of the young people through the open doors.

"What makes you look so serious, Dick?" inquired his wife, as she turned from her study of the merry decorators to surprise a grave look on her husband's face. "Your face looks almost out of place in this holiday joy-fest."

"Then I will hasten to fix it over at once, Madge," he smiled, soberly. "As nearly as I can trace my

thoughts, I was returning silent thanks for the blessing that came to us last fall in the person of that nearly perfect woman yonder. Do you remember my prophecy then, in regard to her and that bunch of youngsters?"

Mrs. Cameron sighed deeply.

"So well that I never look at her lately without wondering what we will all do without her when spring comes."

"Don't cross your bridge until you reach it," advised her husband, philosophically. "She will never leave us again for long. That sort of thing is the breath of life to her; and if you think you would miss her, what about Jessica? Mother is the lodestar of the child's existence."

Mrs. Cameron's eyes followed his glance, and took in the scene. The tree was practically completed, and Jessica was standing by her grandmother's side, circled by her arm, the brown head tilted until it rested against the motherly shoulder. Their very attitude expressed the utmost love and confidence.

"If it were anyone else, Dick, I should be insanely jealous of her. But when I reflect what her wonderful personality has done for our children these last few months, and for the other children also, I can only wonder and rejoice."

"Mamma, papa!" came Jessica's gay voice from



the next room, "come see our tree. It is all ready for your inspection and approval." With a sudden swift glance at each other, which both understood, they obeyed.

Jessica had fastened a shining Christmas angel, with outstretched, glittering wings, laid aside from the home tree of the previous year, in the very top of the pretty little cedar. As one and another brought their quota of gifts for its further decoration, the angel message of peace and good will seemed to breathe in the very air about them. The tree was a marvel of beauty. There were substantial toys for the smallest boy, picture and storybooks chosen with an eye to quality, little articles of personal adornment for the two girls, and some gorgeous neckties and a warm cap for Tony, as well as a complete set of the best strings for his violin. There were apples and oranges galore, and strings of popcorn and red cranberries lent a vivid coloring to the tree. Here and there on its branches, in striking contrast to the gay toys and shining fruits, hung a number of long, brown rolls somewhat resembling cigars. These attracted Mr. Cameron's attention, and he examined them with unfeigned curiosity.

"I didn't suppose this model bunch of kiddies would be guilty of tempting anyone to smoke, even at Christmas time," he jested. "But if those

are not cigars," pinching one lightly with his fingers, "will somebody put me wise?"

"Those are dollar williams, dad," volunteered Don, "and their united aggregation means a new suit for Tony. They may be cigar-money," with a swift glance in Frank King's direction, "as they are all masculine contributions, ladies being barred. There's room for one more—like an omnibus. Want to chip in?"

"He ought to be required to, for that base insinuation about our tempting Tony to smoke!" declared Marjorie. "Let's initiate him into the Royal Order of Goodfellows, and then he will have to!" Suddenly, as though by some prearranged understanding, Mr. Cameron found himself the center of a circling, laughing group, who, with clasped hands, danced around him singing merrily:

"With Saint Nick you are doubtless acquainted,  
 For his name throughout Christendom's known;  
 But you may not be quite so familiar  
 With the subjects that bow at his throne.  
 His vassals are active and many,  
 Their ranks are increasing each day,  
 And, to let the world know what they're doing,  
 They sing as they pass on their way,  
 Oh, we are the Christmas goodfellows, goodfellows, good-  
 fellows,  
 Oh, we are the Christmas goodfellows,  
 Though we're known as 'That Avenue Gang.'

. . . . .

"To the halt and the lame and the needy  
We carry Saint Nicholas' cheer.  
Go hunt up your purse and get busy,  
And don't put it off till next year.  
If you've never known sorrow or sadness,  
If your pleasures seem frightfully tame,  
Come, learn a new measure of gladness,  
Get into the goodfellow game.

Oh, we are the Cleveland goodfellows, goodfellows, good-  
fellows,  
We are Santa Claus' Cleveland goodfellows,  
Though we're known as 'That Avenue Gang.' "

"There's nine more verses, papa," cried Jessica, as the circle paused for breath. "Will you have the rest?"

"I surrender!" he responded, when he could speak for laughter. "Nobody doubts that this aggregation means business. This is the most unique hold-up I ever experienced," and putting his hand in his pocket he drew forth a crisp dollar bill.

"Everybody comes across to the Goodfellows," was Marjorie's laughing acknowledgment, as she deftly wound this last donation with some dull, brown ribbon, and added it to the tree. "I have seen costlier Christmas trees than this," she commented, as she took in the well-laden boughs with approving eyes, "but for downright *swell* and *pretty* I never saw its equal!"

"There's only one drawback about the whole

affair," began Jessica, and her voice was drowned in a chorus of, "What's that?" from the others.

"That we can't be there, to see its reception. I am just consumed with desire to see Pietro unroll a few of those bogus cigars, and I do so want to see Tony and Carlo and little Guido fill themselves to the limit with nuts and candy without anybody to say 'quit.' I want to see Beatrice when she spies those cunning linen handkerchiefs which Kitty Leighton took from her own box and embroidered with a 'B' with her own—"

"Oh, cut it out, Jessica," interrupted Kitty. "But why couldn't we all go down with it on Christmas morning, and sing a Christmas carol for them?"

"I'll bet you haven't seen the sun rise since you were born!" jeered Claude. "You and Margie would make good, healthy subjects to stand around in the snow at daylight, warbling Christmas carols, with the thermometer hovering near the zero mark, wouldn't you?"

"I think it would be best to let the boys take it down late at night," interposed Mrs. Keith, gently, "after making arrangements with Pietro to receive it. You would wish the children to see it the very first thing in the morning. Mamma is going to have Nora roast a small turkey for them, and when I take it down, with a few additions for their Christmas dinner, as many of you as can do so might



go too. Or we might postpone your going till evening, and all go down for a few minutes, following Kitty's suggestion of singing them a carol. You may be sure the children will not rob their tree of much of its beauty for a day, at least."

The latter plan was voted the better one, and the Helping Handers and their boy assistants reluctantly prepared to depart for home.

"Speaking of matinees for late hours," remarked Marjorie, mischievously, as she kissed Mrs. Keith "good-night," just as the clock chimed the midnight hour, "these Goodfellow jambourees have matinees beaten to a frazzle!"

"This 'goodfellow' idea is spreading like a green bay tree!" asserted Don one morning. Certainly, in the few days now remaining before Christmas, its branches seemed to be pushing out from its avenue route into hitherto unreached localities where Christmas cheer was sorely needed. Other offices followed the example set by Mr. Cameron's firm. Indeed, so many inquiries were made of the employees concerning their plan that Mr. Cameron declared, one day at luncheon, that they might as well shut off business and give the remaining three days to the Goodfellow movement.

"It's highly contagious!" agreed Mrs. Keith, gayly. "If you could have been in Convention Hall in Kansas City last Christmas, at the municipal

Christmas tree, you would have enjoyed a revelation. It is time you sleepy eastern people are waking up! You don't know what an enjoyable time at Christmas means until you have belonged to the Goodfellows a year or two."

Christmas eve came at last, and all went to the early Sunday-school entertainment, in which Don and Jessica had a part in the program. Nine o'clock found every boy in the Avenue Gang, transformed into a temporary Santa Claus, lined up at Mr. Cameron's office, with a motor car apiece, and it was nearly midnight before the volunteer messengers completed the work of distribution for the various business firms who had joined the Goodfellow order.

When Donald took his seat at the breakfast table next morning, he was still too full of enthusiasm over the success of the evening's outing to give due consideration to the gifts surrounding his plate: the signet ring from papa to offset the pretty pearl one which already adorned Jessica's slim hand; the crocheted necktie of palest blue, his favorite color; the handsome sweater to match, which could have been wrought only by grandmother's patience and skill; the portfolio of "bones" of houses—a book of studies in world-known architecture—which mamma had secured the same day she had received the tip from Harry as to what Don wanted for "Trismus."

Its counterpart, a book of simple but excellent studies in oil and water color, lay by Jessica's plate. That happy mortal's first waking glance had fallen on the picture of the mountain which had hung over grandmother's desk since her coming, and which had possessed a deep charm for Jessica. It had been transferred to her own room over night, with a card containing grandmother's Christmas greeting.

"How did you know what would please me best of all?" asked Jessica, after the Christmas morning greetings were exchanged.

"I have seen you give it so many loving looks, as they say we should do our flowers when we wish them to grow well, that I fancied the picture would be an inspiration to you, as the real mountain was to me when I was where I could see it every day."

Descending to the dining-room, they found Donald giving his father and mother a glowing account of his evening's experiences.

"I changed my mind about seeing the deliveries made," he was saying. "We knocked at every door and shouted 'Merry Christmas,' and we found some at home every place we went. So we chucked the things inside as soon as the door was opened, and hiked out, singing our Goodfellow chorus as loud as we could yell, as we came away. We had so many thanks and blessings poured out on us,

I am afraid it will make us sanctimonious for a whole year! It was sure some fun!"

While Don rattled on, papa was solemnly examining a couple of legal-looking documents which were connected by a ribbon, and which lay, one on his plate, and one on his wife's.

"This seems to be a joint affair, Madge," he ventured. "I dare you to open yours."

"After you," she replied, laughing. "'Gentlemen first' in this case."

"I may as well 'fess up,' " put in their mother, "that this is a Cleveland Christmas gift with a Kansas string affixed. I hope it will receive due consideration."

" 'He either fears his fate too much,' " quoted Mr. Cameron, and unfolded the paper. It proved to be a deed, made out jointly to him and his wife, which made them owners of forty acres of land upon which were Mrs. Keith's most valuable oil leases. He laid it down in bewilderment.

"I have always had the highest opinion of your levelheadedness, mother," he declared, "but, with all candor, I fear this Goodfellow movement has turned your brain."

"If it has, there is 'method in my madness,' as you once remarked. Don't you see, Dick, that I am unloading my responsibilities before advancing old age gives them a chance to overwhelm me?"



"I am much afraid mother is guilty of boosting for Kansas immigration!" remarked Mrs. Cameron, who had been inspecting the papers. "With such inducements as these, the prospect for victims should not look discouraging to her."

"That's just what I hoped you would say, Madge!" cried her mother, triumphantly.

"This question is too serious to be considered on Christmas morning," decided Mr. Cameron. "I am sorry I cannot return the value of your gift, mother," taking her hand and slipping upon her finger a handsome diamond ring. "But when my ships come in from my oil-wells I may be able to reciprocate further. I know you do not wear rings," with a glance at the hands unadorned save by the thin golden band on the third finger of her left hand, "but perhaps you will break over your rule occasionally in favor of this offering, which is a very slight expression of my appreciation of what you have been to me and mine since you came to us."

As papa was free for the day, the breakfast hour was extended; but directly it was over Jessica walked down the avenue to the handsome house where old Mrs. Jamison lived with her only daughter. Jessica found her alone in her own room, seated before an elegant breakfast. Her face lit up as she saw her young visitor.

"You're such a 'shut-in,' Grandma Jamison," said Jessica, after the first greetings were over, "that I have brought you something to look at, to make your Christmas a little more cheerful."

"The sight of your bright face alone would do that!" answered the "shut-in." "It is kind of a young girl like you to leave her pleasures to remember an old woman like me, on this morning of all."

She caught her breath as Jessica shook the glorious wealth of Christmas roses from their mossy wrappings, and looked about her for something in which to arrange them.

"Let me have them, just for a little while," begged the old lady, holding out her hands, and Jessica laid the fragrant mass in her arms, with a feeling of reverence as she noted the effect of her floral offering.

"You will think I am a silly old woman, dearie," she half sobbed, "but they take me back to the old home in New Hampshire that was nearly covered with roses. They were not such hothouse beauties as these, but sweetbriers and ramblers, and in the yard moss roses—all the old-fashioned kinds that I have not seen for many a year."

"You told me once that you lived in the mountains," said Jessica, softly, "so grandmother sent you a book of New Hampshire stories that she thought you would like. There is a dear Christmas

story in it, about an old couple whose children had all gone to the city to live, and hardly ever came home to the old people except one at a time for a little while. But one Christmas they got ashamed of themselves, and made a plan to leave all their children at home, and play they were children again themselves. They planned to sneak into the old home and hang up their stockings, and give their father and mother a big surprise on Christmas morning. They made it all up with the old servant that had been with their folks for years, and the story of how well they managed it all would make you laugh and cry both. Shall I read it for you now?"

She received an eager assent; so she helped make the invalid comfortable on the couch by the sunny window, arranged the roses in a vase on the table, and, sitting near in a low chair, read the interesting story. When she had finished Mrs. Jamison drew her to the couch.

"Thank you so much, dear child. My children are all in the home up yonder, except this one I live with, and she is very dear. But this fine home has never been to me what the old one was, and the sight of your roses, and the remembrance of your story, will help me to live the old days all over again today. Thank you for coming. I cannot tell you how much pleasure you have given me."

Jessica kissed her warmly, promised to come again soon, and went thoughtfully away down the avenue, which was resplendent with the sparkle and glow of a perfect Christmas morning. Tears came to her eyes more than once as she thought of the sorrowful old lady she had left behind in her elegant loneliness.

"She has nothing to look forward to," she thought to herself, "except a well-cared-for old age, without anybody in it except her daughter. I wonder why all elderly ladies are not like gramsie, with lots and lots of things to do for herself and other folks."

The Cameron family had been invited to take dinner with the Sheldons, and Nora had been permitted to go home for the day, happy in the possession of a new dress and a handsome set of furs—the latter grandmother's gift—also some dainty remembrances from Don and Jessica, who were very fond of Nora. At the Sheldons' the day was given up to social pleasure. The late dinner was scarcely over, however, when a call came over the telephone, and the manager of the Associated Charities asked for *Mr. Donald Cameron*.

"Whew!" exclaimed Donald. "Can that be meant for me? It nearly takes my breath!"

"The amount of turkey and mince pie you have just stored away will go far to account for your



shortness of breath," remarked Jessica, wittily. "What is wanted, Don?—I mean, Mr. Cameron?"

"A number of needy families have been found today that were overlooked last night, and as there is a quantity of provisions left over, Mrs. Leigh has asked me to distribute them. May I, papa?"

"Far be it from me to lay a straw in the triumphant path of the Cleveland Goodfellows," promptly replied Mr. Cameron.

"And will you go too, Claude?"

"Surest thing! I was just wishing for more worlds to conquer on the Goodfellow plan. Let's take the girls out with us, and show them just how it's done."

Permission was given, and the four went gayly away on their mission. Several trips were made from the supply center, and the sun was setting as Don deposited Claude and Margie on the Sheldon doorstep, and turned the motor homeward.

"This Goodfellow business is like an endless chain," remarked Jessica, as, having removed her wraps in her own room, she entered the library, where the family was assembled. "It just keeps going around and around."

"You should see grandmother's room, Don," she went on, mischievously. "It sure pays her to be a Goodfellow. Her table is piled high. I don't believe mamma—Santa Claus—could have left

another thing on it," with a sly glance at Harry, who was in the next room, apparently absorbed in a "really truly" electric engine, that was running smoothly on its shining track, temporarily laid on the big dining-room table. "Besides the family offerings there is a gorgeous sofa-pillow from the club, with everyone's initials in monogram, and a little 'personal remembrance' from every girl in the club besides, which is in direct violation of our agreement. What do you suppose Margie said when I got after her for breaking the rule?"

"It would be hard to guess. What was it?"

"That grandmother had been *an adopted member* of the Sheldon family since early last fall!" rejoined Jessica, laughing.

"I don't b'lieve there is any 'really twuly' Santy Taus," declared Harry, composedly, from the next room, suspending operations with the new engine for a moment. "It's dust your mammas and papas and ovver folks."

"What a silly idea, Harry!" reproved Don, while Jessica giggled. "Of course there's a Santa Claus! Didn't you see him yourself, at the church, last night?"

"Jimmy Smif said that was dust his own papa, dwessed up!" insisted the young skeptic. "Jessica made your necktie, and dranna knitted your sweater, 'cause I saw 'em bof workin' on 'em.

And you made those picser things for Jessica, out in the shop. All the dirls made dranma's tushion, 'cause Jessica dust said so!"

"'Little pitchers have big ears,' " laughed grandma.

"And wide open eyes," added mamma.

"Another of childhood's fond illusions swept away," was Mr. Cameron's comment, as he rose to open the door in response to a gay tumult outside.

"All aboard for Italy!" cried Marjorie's merry voice as the Avenue Gang poured into the warm library, putting an effectual check to Harry's observations on the reality of Santa Claus.

Don and Jessica hurried away for wraps, Jessica insisting on bringing Harry's also, and taking him along.

"Keep a sharp lookout for microbes, Margie," cautioned Mrs. Keith. "There might be a few left."

"I am taking along what you might call a 'deodorizer,' " laughed Margie, opening a large box she was carrying, and displaying a mass of carnations and roses. "We all robbed our Christmas bouquets, and are taking these to Beatrice."

"Hothouse blossoms for the 'Mafia'!" exclaimed Don. "Now, wouldn't you call that the limit?"

Ten minutes later a gay crowd of youngsters were

storming Mr. Giovanni's door, which was immediately flung open, with the noisy chorus:

"Oh, we are the Christmas goodfellows, goodfellows, goodfellows.

Yes, we are the Cleveland goodfellows,  
Though we're known as 'That Avenue Gang.' "



## CHAPTER XIV

### “WESTWARD HO!”

IT was an evening in the latter part of February, and the Cameron children had been out with their sleds since school, making the most of a fall of snow which was exceptionally fine for sledding purposes. Twilight was settling over the city when the three came bustling in, covered with snow, laughing, and stamping, and, as Don affirmed, “hungry enough to eat Jackie, fur, long ears, and all,” at which remark Harry at once set up an indignant protest.

“Brother Don is only joking, you silly!” assured Jessica, removing his coat and muffler. “Do you want to go and help feed Jackie? It is getting dark, and he will be expecting his supper,” and as her little brother disappeared she turned to her mother in a glow of enthusiasm.

“I bet even Kansas hasn’t anything on Cleveland when it comes to sledding!” Jessica asserted. “Everybody lets the kids catch on, whether it is a buggy, a cutter, or an auto. They even *stop* for us sometimes. One man, way down the avenue,

has a big rope, with loops in it, fastened to his car. A whole lot of us caught on at one time, and he turned loose, and went whizzing round a corner with us, and spilled every one of us off into a deep drift that the street-cleaners hadn't reached yet. He went on around the block, then came back and gathered us all up again. He must belong to the Goodfellows! I never had so much fun in my life! Where's gramsie? I want to tell her that there is still one kind of old-fashioned fun left in the world for boys and girls."

"Nora has a sick-headache, so I have sent her to lie down, and grandmother is making muffins," replied Mrs. Cameron. "When you have put away your wraps, Jessica, will you finish setting the table?"

Her mother's face was grave, and she showed such a decided lack of sympathy with Jessica's high spirits that the young girl looked at her in mute surprise.

"What makes you look so sober, mamma?" she inquired at last, uneasily. There was always a sufficient reason for any trace of a cloud on mamma's face, and just now it carried a deeper look of gravity than was likely to be induced by one of Nora's quite frequent headaches.

"Did we stay out too long?" Jessica continued, as her mother did not answer immediately. "I know it is nearly dark, but the sledding is simply fine,

and we are not likely to have many more such snows."

"Is my face such a good index of my feelings, daughter?" answered her mother, smiling wanly. "Well, then, you may as well know the evil tidings at once. We are going to lose grandmother."

Jessica's face whitened, and she almost dropped the tray of glasses she was carrying.

"What's the matter with her?" she gasped. "Is she sick? Has she been hurt?"

"Neither one. But she has had news which will make it necessary for her to go home in a day or two. She will tell you about it better than I can. I feared she must go some time this spring, but we are seldom prepared for something we do not wish to happen."

Mrs. Keith, bustling in at that moment, with a plate of muffins of her own manufacture, dispelled any doubt in Jessica's mind as to her physical condition, at least, and her face wore its usual serene expression. "No need to ask if you had a good time, Jessica," she observed. "Your cheeks are like roses!"

But the memory of her coasting frolic had suddenly lost its charm for Jessica.

"What does mamma mean by saying that you are going back to Kansas, gramsie?" she cried. "You are not going back to stay?"

"I am afraid I must, for a time at least," replied Mrs. Keith, setting the muffins on the table, and drawing Jessica swiftly into her arms. "The man in charge of the farm has written me that he has just received word from his brother in California that his wife is dead, and has left three little children. His brother writes that he will make Mr. Grayson the manager of his large fruit farm out there, if he and Mrs. Grayson will go to him and his motherless little ones. The Graysons have no children of their own, and the opening will be far better for him than anything I could offer. So he wishes to accept the offer and go out at once. So, you see, it will be necessary for me to leave as soon as possible, to find some one to manage my big farm for me this coming year. It will not be an easy matter at this time, as reliable tenants are usually located before this time of year."

Jessica listened in mute dismay. She tried hard to control herself, only to break utterly down.

"You will come back, just as soon as you have found another tenant, won't you, gramsie?" she cried, hopefully, through her tears.

"I shall scarcely be able to get back before fall, dear. I have depended so long on Mr. and Mrs. Grayson, that I hardly know the ins and outs of the ranch myself, now. A new man, of course, will require a great deal of oversight. Then there are



the gas and oil leases, which Mr. Grayson has been looking after for me, and which it will be difficult to put in other hands."

"What do you let Mr. Grayson go for? When he agreed to stay another year, and put it all down in writing (You showed me the lease, you know.), you told me that was to bind him so he could not go back on his promise; and that you would not have to go back until after school closed."

"All true, girlie, but it is different now. Think of those motherless little ones—the oldest only five years, the youngest but three days old when he wrote—and the better prospect for Mr. and Mrs. Grayson, who have been very faithful to my interests. I understand his brother is quite wealthy. I could not in honor keep Mr. Grayson against his will."

Donald entered at that moment, with Harry on his back as usual. Jessica turned such a sorrowful face toward him from grandmother's shoulder that in his astonishment he nearly dropped his little brother.

"What's gone wrong?" he demanded, looking from one serious face to another. "Has papa's oil well caught fire, or has the old cat lost her kittens?"

Even in her grief Jessica could not resist the temptation to tease her brother a little.

"Nora has a headache—" she began.

“That’s nothing new!” interrupted Donald. “Glory be! Would you see that stack of muffins? I’ll bet you made ’em, grandmother”; adding, as he sank into a chair at the table, “Nora’s headaches are to be deeply regretted for Nora’s sweet sake; but they certainly have their mitigating circumstances. Excuse me for ‘dropping down,’ as the drunken man said when he fell into a well, but, to put it plainly, I’ve got a leg ache. It isn’t all in one leg either; in fact, I’ve got two leg aches!”

“You will have to rub them with the ink bottle,” remarked grandmother. “When brother Dannie was quite small he had the leg ache often—‘growing pains,’ mother called it—and one night she got up as usual to rub him with the family liniment, which was kept in the bedroom closet in a tall stone bottle. But in the dark she got a similar bottle containing homemade pokeberry ink, which she applied liberally, giving his limbs quite a remarkable appearance for a few days. It would not have been quite so serious if it had not been in the height of the swimming season, and he would not go in with the other boys till the coloring wore off his legs.”

Don laughed heartily at grandmother’s reminiscence, but Jessica’s smile was fleeting. Her brother’s gay unconcern annoyed her, under the circumstances, and she deftly proceeded to drop the bomb of her own depression upon him.

"You will have to hurry up that case of sickness which nothing but the climate of Kansas was to be able to relieve, Don," she remarked, casually. "Gramsie is going home next week."

Don stared in surprise.

"The dickens she is!" he exclaimed. "You're kidding, sis!"

"I only wish I was," rejoined Jessica, drearily. "It's true, isn't it, grandmother?"

"Too painfully true, I fear," returned Mrs. Keith.

"What's the matter, grandmother? Ain't we treating you right?" demanded Don, who had a boy's dislike for showing his feelings, and asked the first question that came to his mind.

"That's just the trouble," said Mrs. Keith, gravely. "I have been having too good a time, and, as you say sometimes, 'it is time I am getting down to brass tacks,' and attending to my business."

Mr. Cameron had entered the room just in time to be the recipient of Jessica's dire tidings, and his surprise and regret were exceedingly great.

"We cannot let you go, mother," he asserted. "We could better spare one side of the house. We must think up some other plan. There is no need for you to go to stay long, at least. Why don't you dispose of your Kansas holdings, and then you can live in peace?"

“Why don’t I kill the goose that lays the golden egg?” answered his foster-mother, smiling. “Because I am of Scotch extraction, for one reason, and, for another, because I like to play with the goose!”

“But the value of your ranch and your leases, invested in good securities, would bring you in an independent income; and then you could take the world easy.”

“I am ‘taking the world easy’ as it is!” she retorted. “Of the other part of your assertion I am not so sure. It requires quite a sum of money yearly, somehow, to keep me in spending money.”

“You have enough to buy yourself every comfort, to a serene old age, if you didn’t dispense it so freely,” commented her son, jestingly.

“That’s just the point, Dick. I may be conceited, but I don’t believe my investments would return me half so much satisfaction in the hands of somebody else.

“No,” she added, after a pause, “I must go, Dick. But if you are so reluctant to part with me, why not follow me up later, and take upon yourself the task of looking after my obnoxious wealth for me?”

“It is out of the question this season,” replied her son, decidedly. “I have thought lately that I would like to get out of the business I am in, and



take up something less confining, that would at least allow me to get acquainted with my family. The business is paying well at present, however, these youngsters must be educated, and it takes quite a goodly sum these days for such purposes."

"I would volunteer to send Don through college, with your permission, if he wishes to go," went on Mrs. Keith, lightly. "I would even go with him and keep house for him, so that he would not be far from the family apron strings. He does not wish to go to college, however, but prefers to specialize in architecture—"

"Which is worse and more of it, when it comes to the cost," interrupted Mr. Cameron.

"Right there is where the oil wells will come in handy if we keep them in the family," pursued Mrs. Keith.

As the meal progressed there was a noticeable lack of appreciation of grandmother's muffins, Jessica leaving the contents of her plate wholly untouched, and employing herself idly in wiping an occasional tear as it rolled down her small brother's rosy cheek. The subject of grandmother's summons to her western home was discussed in all its phases, and before the family left the table it was decided that she would spend one more Sabbath with them, leaving for home on the following Monday afternoon.

Jessica was first to rise from the table.

"Won't you please excuse me from my music, mamma?" she pleaded. "I couldn't bear the piano tonight." Her mother quietly consenting, she disappeared. Going to her own room half an hour later, Mrs. Keith was relieved to find Jessica already at her desk, intent upon her lessons. As the minutes passed, however, and she noted her pupil's pallor and look of strained attention, she became uneasy, and at length gently laid the books aside.

"I think the lessons will go all right tomorrow, for once, if we don't give them any more time this evening, dear," she said. "Shall we go down? There will not be many more evenings, you know."

"I think I must go to bed, gramsie," was the weary response. "I want to think." Much against her better judgment, for the thinking process seemed scarcely the best occupation for Jessica at present, grandmother went down alone to the family.

Left to herself, Jessica relived, in swift mental review, the weeks and months of the past half-year; and, with a keener vision than anyone but her grandmother would have given her credit for possessing, she realized how much of the happiness of the family circle, and the pleasure of her mates, was due to the sweet kindness of this companion who was soon to leave them. The nutting party,

which had followed close upon the unfortunate "joy-ride," had cemented the club members in a new bond of friendship, and in the organization of the Home Amusement Club Mrs. Keith had improved her opportunity for acquaintance so well, that from that day she had been the personal friend of each member. The club had been such a success from its first night that the two hours devoted to it every Friday night were eagerly looked forward to, and all too quickly passed. Well Jessica knew that one of its chief attractions had been the charming personality of "gramsie," as they all called her now.

She recalled Christmas night, when the club had stayed at Pietro's house for an hour, singing songs and playing games. It gave her heart a new wrench as she remembered that Tony would be obliged to discontinue his violin lessons, in which he was excelling, and that Beatrice would miss grandmother's semiweekly housekeeping helps, in which the young Italian girl was so interested that there was no more tidy kitchen on the avenue than hers. Then, too, there had been the many long happy evenings in the library, charmed into swift flight with music, and stories, and games. Realizing the prospective loneliness of the weeks to come, until her school labors were finished for the year, it is little wonder that Jessica at last gave way to her

grief and drenched her pillow with her sorrowful tears!

Coming to her daughter's bedside an hour later, Mrs. Cameron found the sad eyes still wide open, and a hot flush on the soft cheek. Deeply grieved as she was herself at this sudden parting with one who had come to be regarded as necessary to the happiness of her family circle, she saw the necessity of turning Jessica's thoughts into safer channels, for the time being, at least.

"You should not give way to your feelings in this matter of grandma's going home for a while, darling," she said, tenderly. "It is hard for us all. It is hard for her to leave us even for a little while. But since it is duty we should try to look at it cheerfully, and make it as easy for her as possible. Did you never think, Jessica, that there are those in Kansas who know her, who are wishing just as eagerly for her return, as we are that she might remain with us?"

"They are not her own folks," returned Jessica, rebelliously. "We have the first claim to her."

"They are the people among whom she has lived all her life, with the exception of those few years in the West," said mamma. "You do not know it so well as I do, for grandma is too modest to parade her real value; but when you think of the number of people in Cleveland with whom she has come in



close personal touch in the past six months, and who will feel, as we do, that they can hardly get along without her, you can imagine something of the widespread regard for her in her home community. She is almost a necessity there."

Jessica closed her eyes wearily, but said nothing.

"If everything goes well, she will probably come to us again for the winter," continued her mother. "In fact, she has promised to do so, and it has been papa's intention and mine to send you and Don to her for a long visit this summer, whether we can get away or not. You have but ten more weeks of school."

"Yes, but I'll probably fail in my grades, without gramsie's help," said Jessica, in dull tones, "and have to study all summer under some stupid private instructor; for I just couldn't bear, now, not to graduate with Margie. And we will have to give up our painting lessons, and the club will probably break up and go back to going to picture shows and matinees, just as we had broken ourselves of such things, and Pietro's folks won't get looked after, and—"

Mother laid a kiss softly on the sorrowful mouth.

"Reflect on your 'marcies,' as grandmother would say, little daughter. You and Margie may both have painting lessons from some good instructor, if you wish, and that will keep you interested until grand-

mother's return. The remembrance of what she has done for you young people, and what she would still wish you to do for yourselves, will encourage you to go on with your club. Papa and I will help you with your lessons, as grandmother has done, and the habit of study you have acquired will help you through. Here is grandma, to say 'good-night.' You must go to sleep now, dear. It is getting very late."

Mrs. Keith had purposely refrained from a bedtime visit with Jessica, hoping she would soon find relief from the thinking process in sleep; but when she came to the bedside, she, too, looked concerned as she noted the surface indications of the turmoil in Jessica's mind. She made no comments, however, bade her good-night with a tender kiss, and left the young girl again with her sad thoughts. Jessica lay staring long at the stars in the far-off sky, and fell, toward morning, into a restless sleep.

She left her breakfast, as she had her supper, scarcely touched; and went away to school with her brother on lagging feet. As she joined a group of her mates in the upper hall, her face was the forerunner of her unwelcome tidings, before her lips announced mechanically, "Gramsie Keith is going back to Kansas next Monday."

"To stay?" came the query, in a shocked chorus;

and Jessica explained briefly the necessity for her sudden departure.

"You don't seem very much flustered up about it!" remarked Helen King, in an aggrieved voice. "If she was my grandmother, I'd turn heaven and earth upside down, and old Kansas too, before I would let her go a step!"

"Oh, cut it out, Nell!" said Marjorie, in a swift aside to Helen. "Can't you see she's about all in over it?" Then aloud, "Don't you suppose her Kansas folks want her just as badly as we do?"

"She hasn't got any Kansas folks!" retorted Helen. "Not so much as one forty-second cousin! She told me so herself!"

"But she has always lived right there," insisted Marjorie, "and there must be lots of people there who think as much of her as we do. We have only known her six months."

Jessica left the girls, as one and another joined the group on the landing and fell to discussing the unwelcome news. Seeking her teacher, she found her alone in the schoolroom.

"Mamma said she would like you to take dinner with us tonight at six, Miss Dunn," she said formally. "Grandmother Keith is going away Monday, and that is why she sent you such a short invitation."

"Going away?" The kind voice was full of concern. "I am so sorry to hear it," as Jessica went on

to explain. "Thank you for the invitation, which I accept with pleasure. It will probably be my last opportunity to see her." Then, as she saw the strain under which her pupil was laboring, she added, "I am very sorry she finds it necessary to leave us, Jessica. We will all miss her sorely."

"I realize that she was 'the power behind the throne' in your successful work this winter," went on Miss Dunn, putting an arm gently about the girl. "Contact with her has, in some way, changed my Jessica from a careless dreamer to a model of industry."

"Grandmother taught me to like my work, Miss Dunn," said Jessica, simply. "I could never be careless or indifferent about it again, for her sake. Mamma has promised to help me with my lessons, so perhaps I can still make my grades."

"The matter of 'making grades' is of small importance, dear," said her teacher gravely, "compared to the good habits which your grandmother has been so helpful in forming this winter among you young people. If there were more such women as she to keep in touch with and uphold the work of the public-school teachers, those schools would not turn out so many failures. I could better spare any other woman in Cleveland, so far as my work is concerned."

This was a good deal for Miss Dunn to say.



"Grandmother would be pleased to hear that," said Jessica. "She likes to know that she has helped any one."

"I shall be very pleased to tell her so, and thank your mother for giving me the opportunity," was her teacher's reply, as she turned to her desk.

Jessica's apparent mental distress prompted kind-hearted Miss Dunn to send a note to her mother at the noon hour, suggesting that she be allowed to remain at home for the remainder of the day; but when Jessica learned its contents she strenuously opposed the idea. "I have not missed a minute of school since Don had the scarlet fever," she remonstrated. "I am ahead of Margie in one thing, at least. I am all right, and I want to go back."

She drooped so visibly, however, before the session closed, that Miss Dunn cast more than one anxious glance in her direction, and was relieved when she departed for home, arm in arm with Marjorie. Once there, she went to her own room as soon as Margie left her, and later begged to be excused from appearing at the dinner-table, though Miss Dunn was always a welcome visitor with her.

Papa, Donald, and Harry went to take Miss Dunn to her home, after she had had a cosy chat with the ladies in the library. After the quartet had gone, and mother and daughter were left alone, Mrs. Keith said gravely, "Madge, I am going to

ask you for the greatest favor I ever asked in my life."

"I think I can guess what it is," answered Mrs. Cameron. "I have been reading your thoughts all day, mother."

"What do you think, then, of letting Jessica go home with me, for a more or less extended stay?"

"I hardly know what to say. Do you think it would be best?"

"If I did not, I would not propose it."

"But her school work, just as she is stimulated to excel in it—what of that?"

"I am thinking only of the child's happiness and well-being, Madge, when I make the proposition. She has taken a great fancy to me, and I to her—in short, we are affinities," she said with a smile. "If you think you can trust her to me for a few weeks, I need not assure you that I shall take the best possible care of her and spare no pains to keep her school work up to standard. The change will benefit her in more ways than one; and her absence from the rest of her family will teach her your value, as nothing else could."

"I have no right to say 'no,' mother," sighed Mrs. Cameron. "Dick and I feel that we are under a mountain load of obligation for what you have done for our children this winter."

"On the contrary, it is I who have received the

more benefit by constant association with them," returned her mother. "And you have all the right in the world to choose what you think is best for Jessica. Here comes Dick. Shall we mention the matter to him?"

"I am ready to play policeman, and listen to your troubles," Mr. Cameron said, coming in just in time to hear the query, and settling himself in an easychair. "After the jolt I received last night, I ought to be prepared for anything, unless it were sudden death!"

His wife was not in a jesting mood.

"Mother wants us to let Jessica go home with her for a month or two, Dick," she said seriously, "until she gets settled, and knows what she is going to do with the farm. What do you think of it?"

"That she might as well demand the other half of the house!" exclaimed her husband, promptly. "What ever put such an idea as that into your head, mother?"

"The child's best good," was the quiet reply. "Setting aside the question of my being alone after the Grayson's leave until I find some one to replace them, Jessica's real work will go on better there with me, than it will if she is fretting and moping here without me. I know that sounds conceited, but just now Jessica is having a mild case of heroineitis, and she needs to find out that 'there are others.'

Current slang is so expressive," she added, with a little laugh, "which must be my apology for using it."

"I believe you are right, as usual," said Mr. Cameron, thoughtfully. "You two have seemed to be a sort of mutual admiration society, all winter; and your influence over her is certainly remarkable, when it comes to producing results. Why don't you propose the plan to Jessica, Madge, and see what she thinks of it?"

The suggestion to leave the matter to Jessica herself was at once adopted, and mamma went up to pay her good-night visit, with a dull ache in her heart.

Jessica was not asleep, and she put up one round arm to clasp her mother's neck, as she bent over her.

Already the daughter saw the shadow of the coming separation, as she had noted the joy at her coming, on the face that was still dearer to her than her grandmother's; and the tender influence of that grandmother's unselfish life shone in her words and tone as she said, "We will miss gramsie an awful lot, won't we, mamma? You will miss her more than Don and I will, for the house will be so lonely for you and poor Harry boy when she is gone."

The half-jealous mother-heart gave a sudden thrill, as Mrs. Cameron returned her daughter's caress.

"Papa and I have about decided to let you go



back to Kansas with her for a few weeks, Jessica. Would you like to go?"

For a moment Jessica stared at her mother in incredulous amazement. Then she half rose, and threw her arms again about her mother's neck.

"Oh, mamma, do you really mean it? How lovely that would be! Does she want me to go?"

"Very much, or we could hardly have given our consent. She has done so much for us all, that we can scarcely refuse this request, though I do not see how we can do without you both. She will be entirely alone, after her tenants leave, until she can find another family—for it is necessary to have a woman on the place—and she says you can be much help and company for her. And she will assist you in keeping up your lessons, so that you will not lose your standing in your classes."

Jessica lay back on her pillows with a long sigh of relief and delight. To go home to that wonderful ranch with gramsie, to work and study with her from morning till night! Was the dream she had dreamed the night of her grandmother's arrival in Cleveland really coming true?

Sober second thought dispelled her first transport of joy. If mamma would miss grandma, what of her loneliness with both grandmother and herself away? What of Harry and Don and papa? What of Margie, who had been so faithful to the painting

lessons that her progress had been little short of marvelous?—Margie, who had been grandmother's loyal and earnest champion in her many plans for the pleasure and usefulness of their club?

She lay silent so long that her mother thought possibly, worn out by her conflicting emotions, she had fallen asleep. She bent down, and Jessica put both arms gently around her neck once more.

"I want to go, mamma, oh, you don't know how very much I want to go," she said softly, "but I just don't believe I can. I am certain I could keep up my painting and my music, and my school work too; for gramsie is dandy help. And I would try to help her so much that she would have time for me, but I don't see how I can go. I don't think I would have looked at it this way last fall, for I didn't think very much, then, what 'in honor preferring one another' meant. But now I know that Don and Harry and—the rest, will need me more if grandmother is gone, and I am afraid it would not be right for me to go."

It was now Mrs. Cameron's turn to be silent—she could hardly have spoken just then.

"You had better think it over until tomorrow morning, darling," she said, at length. "Of one thing be very sure, Jessica, mother is very proud of the daughter who can so cheerfully put our needs and desires above her own! There is one thing

more to be thought of, however, and that is grandmother."

Jessica looked inquiringly into her mother's face.

"What do you mean, mamma?"

"We are so apt to look at her as self-sufficient, as so abundantly able to do for herself as well as for others, as she has proved so often, that we are apt to forget that she is human like the rest of us, and that when she returns to her western home she will be away from all her own people again. My little Jessica has twined herself very closely into grandmother's heartstrings in the past six months; is it any wonder she should ask that one tie be left unbroken when she leaves us?"

This put a new face on the matter. "Why don't papa go out there to live, mamma? He can see that grandmother would just love to have him."

"Principally because he dreads to make a change in his business, for fear it might not turn out for the best. Perhaps if you were to go home now with grandmother, and Don were to go out after school closes, and the rest of us go in August when papa gets his vacation, some arrangement like that might be made for the future, and papa be persuaded to try a change of base."

"That would please you, wouldn't it, mamma?"

"I would try to endure it," answered her mother, with a smile. "And now, get this matter all settled

in your mind by morning, girly, for it will hurry us somewhat to fit out another traveler in three days' time."

"I am not going to settle it at all," said Jessica, decidedly. "You and papa and gramsie are to settle it for me, and I will be content with whatever you think best."

"It certainly should not be a difficult matter to get the question settled on that basis," returned her mother, as she kissed her tenderly. And returning to the library, she gave her husband and her mother Jessica's decision.

"Well, Jessica," said her father, as with a cheerful countenance his daughter made her appearance at the breakfast table, "have you settled that momentous question overnight, to your own and everybody else's satisfaction? If not, you had better hurry up, or your wardrobe will be in the condition of Miss Flora McFlimsey's. I assure you they wear clothes, even in uncivilized Kansas."

"No, papa. I decided last night to leave it to you and mamma."

"What question?" demanded Donald, suspiciously.

"The question which came before the house at its last session was whether grandmother should take me home with her or not," said Jessica, adding mischievously, "I did not find it necessary to arrange for a fit of sickness, either."



"You home with her! Not much!" striking an attitude with his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "Am I not the heir of the house, and entitled to first privileges? Am I not also the family book-worm and therefore most in need of a vacation? *You* home with her, indeed! What earthly use do you suppose she would have for *you*?"

"I would keep house," returned his sister, unmoved by this harangue, "while she manages the ranch."

"You know about as much about keeping house as a rat does about Latin!" retorted her brother, with polite sarcasm. "You had better take *me* along, grandmother," he added, turning to Mrs. Keith. "I could hunt eggs, drown gophers, and catch mice, as well as pull off several other stunts connected with an up-to-date ranch."

"With your parents' permission, I will take you both," smiled back grandmother. "Also, the rest of the family."

Mr. Cameron shook his head decidedly, and Harry created a sudden diversion by slipping under the table and setting up a loud and prolonged wail at the thought of Jessica's going away. It required the combined efforts of the family to persuade him back to the consideration of his breakfast. Before the close of the meal it was decided that Jessica was to accompany her grandmother for a month's stay,

at least, and Donald was to go out as soon as school closed, or sooner if it was thought best for Jessica to return.

“ ‘Ah, then and there was hurrying to and fro,  
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,’ ”

declaimed Don, in a high falsetto, as he rose from the table. “Far be it from me to break the news of this second desertion from the ranks of the Avenue Roustabouts, begging pardon, grandmother, to the rest of the gang,” he added, addressing his sister. “You will either be obliged to do it yourself, or hire a hand.”

“Jessica can go to school this morning, if she wishes,” put in Mrs. Cameron. “Grandmother and I will make some purchases for her today, and Miss Yount will have her traveling dress ready for fitting tomorrow morning. If you can be excused at two, Don, we would like you to take us shopping in the car. This warm sun will soon thaw the snow, so that it will be very sloppy to walk.”

“Delighted! I have had no classes after two since holidays; but have been putting in the time at Manual.. At your service, ladies!”

He disappeared, to be seen no more until he joined Jessica at the door as she started for school. She was still uncomfortable in her own mind regarding this latest plan, though it had the endorsement of her elders.

"I don't feel a bit right about going away and leaving everybody," she began. "Do you think I ought to go, Don?"

"I think you would be a big mutt if you didn't!" he replied, with brotherly frankness. "You bet I wouldn't turn down such a chance!"

"You can't think how funny I felt when mamma said gramsie *needed* me," pursued Jessica. "Just as if I was of some importance, you know. I told her at first I didn't think I ought to go away from you and Harry and the rest, and I feel that same way yet," she added, glancing doubtfully at her brother.

"We'll get along all right," he said, philosophically. "I'll be a sister to Harry, and I have so much to do in school from now till June that the time will pass in a jiffy. But you can bet, sis, we'll have high jinks when I do get away out there again!"

"I would have liked the children's club to meet with us tomorrow night, for a little informal farewell," said Mrs. Cameron to her mother, after the two were alone, "but with all this getting ready I do not see how it can be managed."

"It is impossible," declared her mother. "I must be away by Tuesday at the latest; and I wish very much to go on Monday."

At noon Jessica came home with the announce-

ment that Mrs. Sheldon had invited the club members and their families to an informal reception to be tendered Mrs. Keith and herself that evening. A great wail had gone up from the members when it was learned that Jessica was to accompany her grandmother for an extended stay. Marjorie, in particular, was inconsolable, until her mother promised her that she and Claude might go out with Donald, for a couple of weeks in June, instead of taking their usual summer outing at one of the lake resorts.

The reception, on Friday evening, attended by the entire membership and several fathers and mothers, was a pleasant affair, though somewhat overshadowed by the thought of the coming loss of their moving spirit. A more elaborate luncheon than usual was served at this farewell meeting, and the evening was filled with discussion of various plans for their summer's work, and the future welfare of the club. It leaked out accidentally at the meeting that the Avenue Roustabouts, with Frank King as prime mover in the enterprise, were making arrangements to set Pietro up in business in a fruit stand, at a busy corner near Mr. King's banking house. And Mrs. Keith's heart overflowed with joy at a further bit of good news whispered to her by Donald, as they walked homeward.

"I promised Frank I would not tell anyone but



you, grandmother," he said, confidentially, "but I knew you would be so pleased to know that he has not smoked a cigarette nor touched a drop of liquor since the night of our Halloween party. He said if Jessica and I could overlook such a break as he had made only the week before, it was up to him to be fit to train in our gang. It was all your doing, grandmother, inviting him, you know."

"It shall be all yours to hold him to his good resolution," said Mrs. Keith, earnestly. "Don't let him go, Don. If we had left him out that night, this might never have happened. Don't step down yourself, laddie, to the level of an erring friend, but stoop; stoop, and lift up hard."

At the close of the evening, the club presented Mrs. Keith with a handsome Bible, a gold-color ribbon bearing the monogram of each member laid within at the text which was their club motto.

Marjorie, as president, made the presentation speech, and for once her merry ladyship was most impressively solemn.

"We didn't give you a Bible because we think you need one so much, but because we know you use one often, and follow it around a good deal; and we thought it would be a good way to remind you not to forget us. We marked this particular verse because you first taught us how much there was in it. And we are all agreed in promising that,

until you come back, there shall be something doing with this club all the time, along the line you have marked out for us."

Mrs. Keith's voice was quite unsteady, as she received the book, and responded to Marjorie's speech.

"I am afraid I am scarcely equal to receiving properly all the honors that are being bestowed on me this evening," she said. "This aggregation is certainly making my leaving Cleveland very difficult indeed. I am glad, however, that I can take with me the memory of the pleasant friendships I have formed in the past six months, as well as your voluntary promise to keep busy until I come again. *That* I am certain will be before snow flies, if I am permitted to live.

"I shall leave our Italians in your tender care, and shall bring you to a strict accounting," with a rare smile, "if anything goes amiss with them this summer that my Helping Handers might have prevented. And now, I fear we must begin our farewells, or we will tax the patience of our kind hostess, who has made possible this last never-to-be-forgotten evening together."

"We are not going to say good-by this evening, Mrs. Keith," responded Marjorie, as spokeswoman for the group. "We are all going to the train to see you off next Monday afternoon, if you don't

care. We have already been given leave of absence from school."

"We do care, very much indeed, don't we, Jessica? That will be a most acceptable 'send-off.' "

The two following days were filled for the Camerons with the bustle and hurry of final preparations; but for those who were to be left behind the hours of shadow far outnumbered the sunny ones. On Sunday evening Mrs. Keith walked down alone to the Giovanni home. Her leave-taking was extremely distressing, Beatrice giving way to a whirlwind of grief, which made the deep regrets of the others seem slight in comparison. Mrs. Keith was the first real friend the girl had known since the death of her mother; and she vainly tried to comfort Beatrice with promises of return, and frequent letters. The time came when she must be away, and she was forced to unclasp the closely-clinging arms, and go, a storm of sobs following her from the door.

Railway officials, accustomed to handling tons of human freight, are usually indifferent to the coming and going of passengers; but a group at the Lake Shore station on the following Monday afternoon was the center of attraction for a short time. The parlor-car tickets were taken simply in the names of Mrs. Dorothy Keith and Miss Jessica Cameron; but no queen taking leave of her loyal

subjects could have received a more royal farewell than did this sweet-faced, elderly woman, from the group of young people that clustered around her on the platform. Somewhat apart from the others stood a pretty, dark-eyed girl in a red cloak and tam-o-shanter; and as Mrs. Keith approached her to bid her good-by she thrust into her hands a basket containing a choice supply of fruit for the journey. "My father he send this," she said. "He wish you good luck."

The family party which accompanied them had entered the train for a hurried, but less public farewell, when a messenger boarded it hastily, and deposited an immense package, bearing Mrs. Keith's and Jessica's names. With her permission Jessica quickly opened it, while grandmother took leave of the family group; and after her parents and brothers had returned to the platform she reappeared at the open window, her eyes suspiciously moist, her grandmother's arm around her, and her own arms filled with American Beauty roses.

There was a sudden prolonged shriek from the engine, a rumble of moving wheels, and after one last glimpse of the one face in the group outside that was dearer yet than all the rest, the girl sank back in the seat, and was whirled away westward. Jessica's dream had come true!

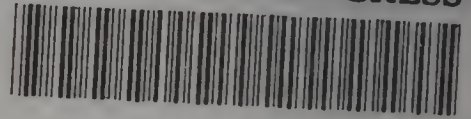








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